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IT TOOK LUGA, THE HALF-BREED, BUT A FEW MINUTES TO GET GERALD GARDNER
OUT OF HIS LIVING TOMB.

Jim, the Sport, in Wake-Up;

OR,

FOGHORN FAN TO THE FRONT.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOLVES OF WAKE-UP.

IT was a pleasant afternoon in the month of June, as a man rode leisurely along the trail from Shelby, Arizona, toward the mining-camp of Wake-Up, located some twenty miles due west from the first-mentioned town, and in the heart of as wild and mountainous part of the territory as exists.

The lone wayfarer was mounted upon a clean-limbed but rugged Indian pony, of vicious aspect, and his trappings were of a superior kind.

He was well-built in person, attired in citizen's attire, armed with rifle and pistols, and evidently accustomed to the saddle, for he rode with ease and grace.

His face was that of a middle-aged man, but a full silver-streaked beard gave him the appearance of being several years older than he really was.

He appeared perfectly familiar with the trail, which ran through a lonely timbered gulch, and his pony had evidently been over the route before, as he gave it a free rein.

Although the trail was not one of the safest in the mountains, the horseman appeared apprehensive of no danger, for he whistled and sung as he rode along, and seemed in a thorough good-humor.

Indeed, it was a day to inspire good-humor. The air was soft and balmy, and perfumed with the commingled scents of pine and mountain flowers. A gentle breeze was stirring, and the birds in the tree-tops made the woodland joyous with music.

The sun was yet some three hours high when the horseman reached a point where a divergent gulch cut the trail, and brought along with it a noisy brook, whose waters were clear as crystal.

Here he drew rein, and allowed the pony to quench its thirst and cool its feet in the stream.

Somewhat tired of the jaunt, the man slipped from the saddle, and approaching a smooth-barked sycamore, he drew his hunting-knife, and carved upon the tree-trunk, in clearly cut letters, the name and date:

"GEORGE GERALD GARDNER,
"JUNE 7TH."

Then, dropping upon the verdant grass, he lit his meerschaum, from which ringlets of smoke went curling into the air.

"Five miles to Wake-Up yet, Doxy!" he said, addressing the pony. "We can rest here half an hour, and then reach camp for supper. This is Wolf Run, and is as good a place to rest as anywhere, except at night!"

At night, Wolf Run was not a desirable place for a camp. For years, since first known to trappers and other men of the mountains, the locality had been famous as a rendezvous of wolves at night—not of a stray pack, but of hundreds, that came from all directions, and for many miles around; big wolves, little wolves, wolves of both sexes—wolves fierce and blood-thirsty, gaunt and starving—wolves full to repletion from some horrid feast.

In fact, it was a convention ground for seemingly the entire wolf population, where they held nocturnal caucuses and made the night a howling pandemonium.

That many a Mr. or Mrs. Wolf had gone down at these conventions, there was ample proof, for, for hundreds of yards about the fork were their bones and skulls.

Perhaps among them a careful searcher might have found human bones, for more than one rash mountaineer had lost his life there from a curiosity to be present at one of the nightly "meets," and his body had furnished the delegates with material for a barbecue.

Owing to this fact, few men of the mountains cared to be in the vicinity of Wolf Run after nightfall.

Tradition had it that this congregation of wolves was presided over by a human being, who mingled freely with the ravenous brutes—that they obeyed his slightest command, and that there were valuable deposits of gold at the forks, over which the wolves were supposed to stand guard.

But not one out of ten men who had ever heard this tradition had the least faith in it—at least, no one took enough interest to inaugurate an investigation.

Gerald Gardner was familiar with the history of this trysting-place, but had no fear for his personal safety during the time he intended to tarry there; so he took his time at his smoke, and then, feeling rested, he restored the pipe to his pocket and whistled to his pony.

"Come, Doxy! We'd better be jogging along, or we shall have the wolves sampling our shin-steak!"

The pony, evidently trained to obey, came up out of the water, and Gardner swung himself into the saddle.

As he did so his eyes met a sight that, to say the least, startled him.

Suddenly, all around him, as if coming from the very earth, there arose a number of figures from behind various places of concealment—men clad in somber gowns and hoods that concealed their faces.

Each hand grasped a cocked revolver, and each weapon was leveled full at the lone rider. A dozen of this strange band there were, and a dozen pairs of eyes gleamed through the eye-holes in the vails of their hoods.

So thunderstruck was the horseman at the apparition that he sat staring around, without making any effort to escape. Indeed, such an attempt would have been useless, a fact which he only too well realized.

"Gerald Gardner, you are my prisoner," the leader of the party said, in a voice evidently disguised. "Are you aware of the fact?"

"Well, I should smile," Gardner replied,

good-naturedly. "To whom am I indebted for this favor?"

"You won't think it much of a favor, maybe," the leader replied. "Before you you behold the Wolves of Wake-Up, who are equally as savage as the wolves who make this their camp-meeting ground each night."

"Ah! from Wake-Up, are you? I was not aware that Wake-Up could turn out so formidable a band of cut-throats. The camp must be depopulated at the present time, I should say!"

"No; plenty more of the same stock are still there. Now, Gardner, I have prepared a sort of inventory of you, and I would like to know if everything is correct, for after you are dead and gone, it may be of interest to your friends to read an obituary in the *Wake-Up War-whoop*. You are Gerald Gardner, of Wake-Up?"

"So I am."

"You are a man of some forty sweats-and-snow-storms?"

"Forty-four."

"You look younger. You came to Wake-Up one year ago?"

"Correct."

"And brought your family, consisting of two sons and a daughter, who were triplets?"

"Just so, Mr. Lupus."

"You engaged in business as a pony-express agent, but finally gave that up and took to the business of doing nothing?"

"Well?" Gerald Gardner's face grew a trifle more stern of expression.

"Well," the leader of the Wolves went on, "the moment you began to play up gentleman, bad luck overtook you. First, your daughter Fanny, as you construed it, disgraced you and you killed her!"

"I did not!" the prisoner retorted. "She poisoned herself!"

"That's what you say, but sure's my name is Dark Dan, I believe you poisoned her, and I allow there's plenty others think the same way I do!" the chief declared, pointedly. "Anyhow, you had her life insured, for five thousand dollars, and drew it, which helped to boost you up in the world, and make ye one o' the big men o' Wake-Up!"

An angry flush reddened the face of the rider, and a steely glitter entered his dark eyes; but he made no response.

"Well, shortly afterward, one of your sons, named Grant Gardner, visited this place, Wolf Run, to kill wolves, in the company of two companions—Carrol Carker, and Rough Slugger, then the bully of Wake-Up. Slugger returned, during the night, and reported his companions torn to pieces by the wolves. As two fleshless skeletons were found, the next morning, it was accepted as evidence that the two unfortunate young men were dead. Did you profit by the fact, Gerald Gardner? Why, of course you did! An insurance had also been placed on Grant's life, and you raked in another cool five thousand, to sport about on. Mighty convenient thing, to have such a boodle coming in, now and then, wasn't it?"

There was a significance in Dark Dan's speech that the citizen of Wake-Up evidently did not relish, but he made no response, which seemed

an acknowledgment of the truth of the chief Wolf's accusation.

"Well," Dark Dan went on, "one more of your family remained—Ernest Gardner—whose life was insured, and it was the natural expectation of the folk of Wake-Up, that he, too, would turn up his toes, for the pecuniary accommodation of his parent, but, such did not prove to be the case. Ernest concluded to sojourn here below, for a certain length of time, and was not bashful in apprising you of the fact. The upshot of the matter was, father and son quarreled, and have since remained on very bad terms."

Gerald Gardner uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"What is all this nonsense to me?" he cried. "There's not any truth in the statements you make or the inferences you draw. I want no more of this talk. Why have you vagabonds stopped me here, and what do you want?"

"Oh! you shall learn, if you take it cool and easy," Dark Dan assured. "We Wolves of Wake-Up do things on the square, when we do any thing, you can bet. You see, the fact is, things are getting decided blue in our blooming young city. The yield of both gold and silver is petering out, and grub gets higher and higher. To make matters worse, a reduction of wages has been sprung on the miners, at the McKandlass Mine. Who was instrumental in causing that reduction, Gerald Gardner?"

"I was!" was the haughty answer. "I apprised Miss McKandlass that the mine was not panning out sufficient to warrant her in paying the old wages, and she ordered the reduction."

"Exactly. What business had you to stick your nose into the matter, Gerald Gardner?"

"That matters not to you. Miss McKandlass is an unprotected lady, and needs some one to look after her business interests!"

"And you propose to do it for her, in hopes of eventually marrying her, and getting control of her wealth. You're a clever rogue, Gerald Gardner, but necessity compels me to inform you that your bobbin has played out, to the end—your usefulness has ceased to be useful. You have a snug little insurance of ten thousand dollars upon your own life, and we, the Wolves of Wake-up mean to collar it in good shape!"

As Dark Dan ceased speaking, he gave a quick signal. The men who were behind the prisoner, instantly leaped forward, and dragged him from the horse to the ground, where, in a twinkling, he was bound, hand and foot.

"Oh! we've got ye, foul!" Dark Dan declared, bending over the prisoner. "There's nothing mean about us!"

Gardner made no response, but shut his lips, firmly, as if determined to meet his fate with heroic bravery.

"Mebbe ye ain't quite posted as to the exact way we're going to fix ye up. Ye see, it has come to our notice that you have made a will, leaving everything you possess, or expect to possess, to Miss Martha McKandlass. Now, if you were to peg out, your life insurance would accordingly go to her."

Gardner still made no answer.

"Oho! ye don't admit the corn, eh?" Dark

Dan went on, triumphantly. "It don't make a bit of difference whether you do or don't. Your silence is sufficient, in this case. Yes, the ten thousand and what else you have would go to Miss Martha—pretty, fatherless, motherless, Miss Martha, who, if she don't get married in the course of a few years, will be an old maid. Naturally one would inquire what benefit we Wolves would be likely to get from the insurance, so long as you had fixed things up so cleverly in favor of the contemplated future Mrs. Gardner? The answer is pert and plain—because yours, truly, Dark Dan, is engaged to be married to Miss Martha. Therefore, now, oh! Gerald, thou knowest why it is best that you should die. As to the method, you shall see."

At another signal several of the Wolves brought forward spades, and began to dig a deep hole in the ground. It being of alluvial formation, they experienced no trouble in their work, and soon the hole was there.

Then Gerald Gardner was raised, and he was dropped into the pit in an upright position, which left his head protruding just above the surface.

The dirt was then shoveled in around him, and except for his head he was literally buried alive.

Never during the performance of the job did he utter a word of protest but his eyes spoke volumes of revengeful anger.

"There you are!" Dark Dan announced when the "planting" was finished. "You can grow up to seed here, unless the wolves get ye. They'll be congregatin' hyer soon, and ef they value your carcass as good fodder, no doubt but what they'll take advantage of the opportunity to sample it. Anyhow, it can't be said we murdered you!"

Then without another word the chief turned and strode away, followed by his comrades.

And Gerald Gardner was left to perish there, where the wolf-horde made the night hideous with their wild orgies!

CHAPTER II.

MARTHA.

WAKE-UP was pretty nearly what Dark Dan had indicated—a town that was "petering out." Its first start-off had been reasonably brilliant, and for a time the indications were that it would eventually become a permanently prosperous Western city—which belief had caused a smart little town to spring up, with a sheltering capacity for two or three thousand souls; but Wake-up unfortunately never had been able attain to so numerous a population, and when it became evident that the McKandlass Mine was the only paying one in the region, the town soon dwindled to not over five hundred people, not over half of whom were employed as miners.

The balance of the population was made up of those who did not care to work, could not get work, or worked (at the gaming-table) to corral the earnings of those who did work—a batch of humans, rough, wild, and fearless, who had seldom, if ever, known what it was to spend a night outside of a "b'ilin' camp," with its saloons and other dens of depravity.

As before stated, the McKandlass Mines, two in number, were the only ones in Wake-Up productive of any profit to the owner, and the present owner was Miss Martha McKandlass, who had inherited from her father.

Patsey McKandlass had originally located and opened the mines, but, owing to the fact that several horses had followed him away to be sold, he had been forced to perform the rope act of Judge Lynch. This was in Wake-Up's earliest days.

Since his demise, Miss Martha had been sole owner and manageress of the mines, which, of late, had not panned out as much profit as usual.

The intimation of Dark Dan to Gerald Gardner that a few years more of single blessedness would bring Martha to that period in life when girls become old maids, was, in truth, without cause, for those who ought to know averred that Martha was "not yet a voter." She had been a mere chit of a child when she came to Wake-Up a few years before; and could not well be over twenty; nor did she look over that age; yet she was generally dubbed "Old Maid Martha," an appellative which she herself had incurred through having the following notice published in the *Wake-Up Warwhoop*:

"WANTED: A HUSBAND:—A smart man, not over thirty, handsome, brave and well-bred, with an even temper, good address, and a capability for business. Must not expect to boss over half of the ranch (I boss the other half); must not drink to excess, nor have a penchant for mashing other women, and must calculate to share all spoils with me equally. Such a man can find a red-headed wife, with blue eyes, fair-to-pretty face and figure, even temper, and a couple of gold mines. Competition open to all.

"MARTHA MCKANDLASS,

"Wake-Up."

This pre-eminent fact, that Martha desired to enter the matrimonial harness, had caused some local wit to suggest that it was plain proof of Martha's being further on in years than any one knew; hence, from that time on, she had been dubbed, as before mentioned, a fact that did not appear to give her the least provocation; on the contrary she treated it as a good joke.

Saying that Martha was plump and pretty, would be doing her but the barest credit. She was in face and form strikingly pretty, although her wealth of well-kempt hair was of the brickiest hue.

She possessed a warm, happy nature; was well-bred and educated, and no one could know her but to admire.

Despite this fact, and the accompanying one that she had been besieged by numerous suitors, her advertisement in the *Warwhoop* had not been instrumental in her taking to herself a husband, although here were a number of Wake-Up's citizens who prided themselves that they stood the best chance in the race.

Notwithstanding their conceit, Miss Martha had made no declaration of preference, that had been made public, and it was generally believed that the man yet had to come who would carry off the prize.

Gerald Gardner, and his two sons, had been

her devoted suitors, but had seemed to win no more of her favor than a number of others.

Ernest Gardner, who was counted one of the most attractive men in Wake-Up, was a well-built fellow, a decided blonde, with handsome features, hair and mustache, and a liberal education; and some believed that he would be successful; but others who knew that he was possessed of a wicked temperament, and was inclined to dissipation, argued differently.

Martha McKandlass was too shrewd a girl to ally herself, for life, to any man who was likely to be a discredit to her, as well as a cause of unhappiness.

Just at sunset of the afternoon, that had witnessed the occurrence of the events chronicled in our first chapter, Martha had a call from Ernest Gardner.

She was sitting on the vine-covered porch, of the little cottage she had caused to be built and furnished since her father's demise—sat there, prettily attired in a costume of snowy white, with flowers at her throat and her hair becomingly arranged, when the front gate opened, and young Gardner sauntered up the white-pebbled walk.

He was faultlessly attired, and with his mustache waxed, and his display of diamond jewelry, looked Adonis like enough, to have set any susceptible young lady in a flutter.

It was not so with Martha, however. She simply smiled and nodded, and handed him down a chair, as a hint for him not to sit beside her, on the steps of the porch.

"This is a lovely day, Mr. Gardner," she observed, continuing to knit away at the tidy she was making.

"Beautiful!" he declared, tossing away his cigar. "What a lovely time this would be to take a gallop as far as the cascade, and I am sure I should be delighted to have your company."

"Indeed, but I should not care to go this evening, Mr. Gardner. I care very little to go riding of late, and then, too, evenings I am generally not at leisure."

"That is a fault of your own. I am aware that both my father and Major Dugdale are forcing their attentions upon you, and if I were you I'd give them a cool invitation to make themselves scarce. Or, if you wish, I will interest myself enough to see that they bother you no more."

"You are extremely kind, sir, but I prefer to act for myself in such matters if any action is necessary."

"Ah! then you are in favor of receiving the two old duffers, eh?" and young Gardner's face assumed a flush of anger.

"Sir! It is not becoming of you to speak thus in my presence!" Martha replied, gravely. "Whether I favor the attentions of the gentlemen or not it cannot matter to any one. I consider myself fully adequate to the task of managing my likes and my dislikes."

Gardner bit his lip in vexation; then broke into a forced laugh.

"There, now, that's you, exactly; getting as saucy and angry as a setting hen, and all without cause. Of course it's none of my business, nor any one else's, whom you receive, so long

as you don't get the matrimonial yoke around your neck. If you were to wed, then I should be mad in earnest."

"Would you?"

"Most assuredly. You know I have declared my undying affection for you, and even had done that prior to your putting the advertisement in the *Warwhoop*. Should you marry one or the other of these two old men, I am sure I would be excusable for getting angry and revengeful."

"You surely ought not, Mr. Gardner. I have never given you any encouragement whatever, no more than I have others who have sought to get control of a fortune by marrying me. The man of my choice has not yet located in Wake-Up, and I am extremely doubtful if he ever does locate here."

"He would no doubt find it more to his good health if he did not!" the lover declared, significantly.

"By which, I presume, you imply a threat against the man who might meet my approval," Martha said, looking him straight in the face.

"Just that, exactly!" Gardner responded, with a cool effrontery. "You might as well understand the truth first as last, Martha. I have set my heart on having you for my wife, and I don't calculate to be disappointed. Obstacles may arise, but I shall remove them. Suitors may be received by you to the tune of dozens, but I'll guarantee to give each one of them such an infernal whaling that he will be glad to withdraw from the contest. Those are my sentiments, and you will find that I will adhere to them to the letter."

"Then, all I have to say is this: I wish the object of my yet-to-be-decided choice would come along just now!" Martha declared, with sparkling eyes."

"Ha! do you?" Ernest breathed, excitedly.

"Why do you wish that?"

"Because I'd like to set him at you, and see some of your conceit taken out of you."

"Indeed! If my whaling the object of your choice would help to a higher place in your estimation, I could heartily wish the same as yourself."

"It certainly would cause me to modify the impression I have long since formed of you!" Martha replied.

"Ha! what impression?"

"That you were more cowardly than brave. Excuse me for telling you of it, but that is the opinion I have always had of you, sir!"

So great was his rage and astonishment at this thrust that he could not speak for a few moments.

"I a coward!" he at length gasped. "Why, girl, I am astounded. I never merited this insult at your hands."

"Maybe not," Martha replied, "but when I marry I want a man who is amply able and not afraid to protect me. And I do not believe you would fill the bill."

"Show me your man and I will show you how much of a mistake you have made! You dare not promise to marry—"

"Stop!" Martha interposed, authoritatively. "Tell me, truthfully, one thing—it's a secret, I

believe, and I'll keep it—and then I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Well, what is it?"

"Your sister, Fanny Gardner, whom every one believes is dead, is *not* dead!"

She spoke more assuredly than interrogatively, even though it was an inquiry that she made.

Ernest Gardner gazed at her a moment half-defiantly, then said:

"All I can tell you is, that I believe she never was buried where the slab marks her grave!" he replied.

"It is as I thought!" Martha said. "Where is Lieutenant Steele, the monster who was the cause of her unhappy fate?"

"I do not know. He fled, you know—was dishonorably discharged from the army. What became of him after that no one knows."

Martha remained sober and silent a few moments, evidently in deep reflection. Finally she said:

"What I have to say to you is this: I will give you a chance to win or lose me. If you lose, you are to forever keep your distance, and never to let me hear any more of your protestations of love. If you win, I have but the choice either of wedding you or else turn over to you all my interest in the mines of Wake-Up!"

"Ha! Good enough! You are even more clever than I gave you credit for being. What do I have to do to win?"

"Stand up before the first man I pit against you and whip him with bare fists, until you knock him out!"

"Excellent! I can do that with ease, for in the East I took thorough courses of sparring lessons of the cleverest professionals, and became the terror of Harvard. Yes, my sweetheart, you cannot pick out your man any too soon to suit me, and I will do him up in one round and win my bride."

"That is yet to be decided!" Martha said. "I wish—"

"By the way, how do you think I would fill the bill in the way of providing a little amusement?"

It was a strange voice, and the owner of it stepped from around the corner of the cottage!

CHAPTER III.

"THE MAN WHO NEVER SAW A WOMAN."

ABOUT half an hour before the appearance of the stranger at the McKandlass cottage, a unique individual rode down into Wake-Up, from the dug-way stage road, and reined in his scrawny mule at the door of the first and worst saloon in the camp—the "Bloody Bear," where the toughest characters of the camp, headed by one supreme ruffian called Jake Grab, usually hung out.

We say unique, of the wayfarer, because he was a "specimen brick" of that wild region, from head to foot.

His costume, remarkable for age, was made of buckskin and the greasiest kind at that, and was ornamented with some trophy of every sort of mountain game, from an eagle's claw to a grizzly's foot. He wore ponderous, stogy boots and a small arsenal of weapons, but was hatless.

His proportions physically were those of a giant; his hair was worn in an immense shock upon his head, and trained to grow straight upward while his face was covered with a heavy but matted beard of the reddest hue, in decided contrast with his hair, which was of flaxen color.

Such portions of his face as were not covered by beard wore a waggish expression, especially his large mouth and keen brown eyes.

He drew rein before the "Bloody Bear" with a resounding "Whoa'p, Janywary!" and took a good look at the surroundings. While he was doing this, a number of the "cit's" came out of the saloon, and regarded the red-whiskered stranger critically.

Men they were, whom rough associations, and worse whisky, had made coarse and belligerent men, from whom the finer instincts of human nature had long since fled, leaving nothing but the gross and bad.

"Haow d'ye do, friends," the stranger sung out, in a voice strongly nasal. "I s'pose this byer aire what ye call Wake Up, hey?"

"You bet it's Wake-Up!" Jake Grab declared, with a scowl—a man, this Grab, short and stout, with a darkly sinister face, and eyes, hair and mustache of jetty blackness. "This aire Wake-Up, an' thar's plenty o' suckers an' tenderfuts w'at comes hyar who wakes up on ther furder side o' Jordan!"

The announcement, delivered in the bally's most insolent manner, did not appear to disturb the stranger's equanimity.

"Ye don't say!" he observed, ejecting a quid of tobacco from his capacious mouth, that would have made a meal for a cow, had it been grass. "Now, d'ye know, I don't allow ye take me fer a soft-sole, do ye? I don't luk like'r galoot w'ot hed never been around some, do I?"

"Reckon ye ain't so smart but what you could get yer eye-teeth cut, byer in Wake-Up!" Grab growled. "We ain't partial to smart Alecks, nohow, and ye can bet too much, back talk means death!"

"Oh! et do, does it? Waal, neow, that strikes me as jest the sort of town I'd like to settle down in fer life, et do. I'm handy at carpenter trade, an' can put tergether a coffin, as quick or quicker than the next man. But, by the shakes o' St. Vitus, I forgot ter tell ye sumthin'. I'm a livin' cur'osity, I am!"

"Ye luk like one!" sneered Grab.

"An' I am one!" the stranger asseverated, with a broad grin of satisfaction. "I ain't no small fry, nuther. Now thar aire deef'rent sorts o' curiosities, by ther c. w. t., but nary a one so skeerce to prodooce as yours truly Slumgallion Sloat. What d'ye s'pose I am—what aire my natt'ral attractions, as a wonder o' the world?"

"Ye'r' a cannibal!" suggested one of the crowd.

"No! he's the missing link!"

"Or the Flyin' Dutchman."

"Ye'r' all wrong!" Jake Grab cried. "He's either one o' three things—a temp'rence lecturer w'ot never drinks, an honest man, or a cussed fool!"

"Nayther! nayther!" Slumgallion assured. "As rare as aire those curiosities ye mention, I take the snake fer bein' greater than any on

'em. I am ther great, the only an' original galoot, that never saw a woman!"

This declaration, as may be supposed, elicited a snort of surprise from the crowd, as well as incredulity.

"Oh! it's dead sure so!" the stranger went on. "Ye may think I'm yankin' yer reason-string, but I ain't, ye know. I'm perzactly ther curiosities I reprezent, an' hyer I am, on exhibition, so that ef ary o' ye wants me ter pass around the hat, I'll oblige ye by remarkin' that mine war chawn up by a grizzly, over sixteen yeer ago—by a grizzly, mind ye. No, seree, bob-tail burro, I never see'd one o' ther female critters, though I've heerd an' read a pile about 'em, an' their pecooliarities. Ye see, I war born, when I war quite young, an' couldn't remember much, an' dad fetched me out inter ther mountings, an' thar he an' I's lived, eversence, till he pegged out, a week ago, an' I broke up housekeepin'. Ye see, I heerd from a trapper as how ye had a gal down heer as war powerful anxious ter git spliced to a chap o' my description, an' so I come down to take a squint at the anymile. Is she broke ter drive in single an' double harness?"

"You bet!" Jake Grab declared. "She's a tearer, old man, an' ef she don't comb yer hair fer ye, thar'll be fun."

"Comb my ba'r, will she? Now, d'ye know, I don't allow uo one ter do that aire leetle thing? Sart'in! My ha'r aire my own, an' proud ov' et I am. But, jest whistle out yer hostler, an' arter we hev a smile, I'll look at the gal. Ef she aire a gud 'un, an' her ha'r matches my auburn beard, the chances are that I will buy her, fer spot cash!" and with this announcement, Mr. Slumgallion Sloat dismounted, and entered the "Bloody Bear," motioning to the bystanders to join suit—which they did not hesitate to do, but put their frontage to the bar, with an alacrity that spoke volumes for their appetite for "bug-juice."

"That's right, fellers; wet yer larynx freely. Durned ef I ain't pleased ter meet ye, an' ef I git the gal, an' hev any spare change left, by the shakes o' St. Vitus I'll come down an' return this treat. Heer's my ginnywine thanks, pilgrims—I'm lookin' at ye!" and raising his brimming glass, the unique man "downed" its contents in a way that proved he had learned the use of the liquid, even if he never had seen a sample of womankind.

But those thirsty mortals of Wake-Up paused and stared, with their glasses half poised, while Jake Grab let forth an oath of fearful import.

"What war that?" he roared. "Didn't ye invite us in hyer to drink wi' you?"

"Well, I should cackle an octave, not!" Sloat retorted. "Do I look like a chap o' that sort? I motioned ye in ter pay fer my likker, on ther strength o' my bein' a curiosity, an' fer ye ter have the honor o' seein' me swaller the snakes."

For a moment the bums of the Bloody Bear appeared thunderstruck, at this piece of unmitigated cheek, and that, too, practiced by an utter stranger, who, in their opinion, ought to consider himself fortunate in being able to mildly introduce himself among them without getting half-killed.

Grab set his glass down upon the bar, and drew a revolver.

"See hyer, me man!" he cried, hoarsely, "d'ye know that you've sealed yer doom by makin' so poor an estimate of us pilgrims o' Wake-Up? Ye'r' a curiosity, mebbe, but ye'r' goin' ter croak, afore ye ever set eyes on a woman!"

"No, I ain't, am I?" and the curiosity smiled serenely. "Ye wouldn't use that aire pill-driver, on me, fer a mint o' unadulterated gold, you wouldn't!"

"I wouldn't hev?"

"No, ye wouldn't. When I asseverate that same, I don't illustrate ther fact ter say ye wouldn't durst do et, fer I am aware that yer as full o' blood as a boardin'-house bug. But I simply wish ye to know that I know that you know, that ye wouldn't harm one hair o' me head, fer the world!"

So confidently did the stranger make this assertion that Grab regarded him both in hesitation and surprise. He was puzzled what to make of the fellow.

"I'd jest like ye to explain the reason why I won't salivate ye!" he growled. "I allow ef I wanter shute ye, shute I will!"

"Exactly, ter a dot!" Sloat acknowledged. "But ye see, my friend, ye don't wanter shoot me. Ye bain't got no cause—no reason why. Ye don't know me, ner ain't found me out. Why, I'm one o' ther best fellers the world affords, I am. Ye didn't suppose I'd be stingy mean enough ter waltz in hyer, an' run ther risk o' gittin' salivated, just fer ther sake o' buyin' an' payin' fer one drink fer ye? No, sir-ee! I ain't no sech a darned fool. I sized ye up ther minnit I set eyes on ye, an' I seed what yer was wantin'—ye didn't want no ten-drap sensation botherin' yer gullets—ye want a bar'l, ter make ye know that ye've had a drink. That's what's ther matter, an' hyer am I, ther colossal curiosity ov ther century, ter buy, pay for, an' set up that same bar'l. So, neow, shute erway, an' arter ye git done shutin' we'll take another snifter wi' Slumgallion Sloat, ther man who never saw a woman!"

There was a yell of applause then, on the part of the majority of the men, and even Jake Grab restored his weapon to his belt, with a grunt of approval.

"Durn me ef ye ain't ther stuff!" he volunteered to declare, "tho' I'd 'a' surely plugged ye ef ye hadn't changed ther swell o' yer tune!"

The man who never saw a woman made no reply, but proceeded to shell out a handful of gold pieces upon the bar, which the red-nosed bartender gathered in, with a great deal better grace than he had manifested a few minutes before.

After imbibing several times, and inviting the others to do so repeatedly, Sloat at length caught upon an opportunity, and slipped from the "Bloody Bear" with an evident feeling of relief!

Down the street he strode, to be stared at by every one who met him, until he arrived at the Big Injun Hotel, which was the only hostelry in the camp.

January, his attenuated mule, had already reached the place, as if satisfied it were the proper place to put up at, and was contentedly

munching bits of grass that grew before the veranda.

Paying no attention to the animal, Sloat entered the office of the hotel, and found what he was looking for—the local post-office.

Stepping to the window, he asked for mail, in a tone of voice that proved he was not particular about being heard.

There was no danger of this, however, as only a few people were in the vicinity at the time.

Two letters were handed him, and seating himself in the first chair convenient, he gave himself up to their perusal.

The first examined read as follows:

"W. J.: Sir—I am now satisfied that you are on the right scent. Leave no stone unturned to learn the truth, and if as I suspect, you know what you have to do.

"LIEUT. STEELE."

This missive seemed to give the man who never saw a woman no particular interest, for he folded it and stored it away carelessly in a pocket of his singular costume.

The second letter, however, appeared to enlist more of his attention.

It was written by the same person as the first, and ran thus:

"W. J.:—I find that I am not wrong. Jim the Sport, is located in the vicinity of Wake-Up, with a score or more of men with him. What he intends doing I do not know; but I do know that the child still lives, and she knows where it is. She, I have every reason to believe, is with him;—that remains for you to find out. Remember I am ready to pay a big price for the job. But there must be no botch-work about it—it must be sure. I may come to Wake Up at any time, but no one will be the wiser but you. Make yourself generally solid.

Lt. S. S."

CHAPTER IV.

JIM, THE SPORT.

BOTH Martha McKandlass and young Gardner gazed around in startled surprise as they heard the challenge, and saw a stranger step gracefully forward into their presence.

A finely-built stranger, too, and neatly attired in the costume of the frontier sport, even to the broad sombrero and top-boots; a handsome fellow not yet in his thirties, apparently, with a face to win any woman's admiration, dark, magnetic eyes of singular power of expression, brown hair, goatee and mustache, the former worn very long in a wavy silken mass, and the latter gracefully trained.

He had no weapons, evidently trusting himself to hand and tongue.

He raised his hat and bowed low as he stood before the astonished pair, then turned his penetrating gaze upon Ernest Gardner, as much as to say:

"Well, what have you got to say about it?"

Gardner stared back coldly in return, in no wise pleased at the dashing fellow's sudden appearance, and conscious, too, that Martha was regarding the sport with undisguised admiration.

For a moment neither of the trio uttered a word, but surveyed each other criticisingly.

Then the sport spoke:

"You will excuse me, young lady," he said, "for thus intruding on your privacy, I trust. I was nearing your cottage and about rounding

the corner yonder, when by chance I overheard your companion addressing you in a manner not exactly lover-like, and it occurred to me to await in the vicinity in case you might need my protection. Of course I could not well help overhearing the main drift of your conversation, and as a joke I made my presence known. I trust you will excuse the intrusion. Good-evening."

"Stop, pray!" Martha commanded, as he would have turned away. "Yours is a timely intrusion. You are evidently the very person I have been looking for, for some time. I advertised for a husband some time ago, just because the whim pleased me. Since that time I have been bothered with protestations of quick-born love from every Tom, Dick and Harry in Wake-Up, this young gentleman among the lot. As I have no special admiration for him, I proposed to get rid of him in the manner you heard me indicate. As you are a man who seems worthy of the name, I must request that you do me a favor."

"I shall be pleased to accommodate you, young lady, if in my power. I infer, however, that you wish me to enter into a fight—which is against my principles, unless I am crowded upon."

"You have guessed what I desire you to do—give Mr. Gardner a thrashing that will effectually cure him of any love spasms, that may again assail him!"

"I should very much hate to lay hands upon the gentleman, without provocation."

"Then if it's provocation you want, I can give you plenty of it!" Gardner cried, springing to his feet. "I am not afraid but what I can boss you, and for illustration of the fact, take that!"

He took a step forward, and by a dexterous move, succeeding in slapping the sport in the face.

"Now, tell me your name, and I'll finish the job," he cried, with a sneer.

"My name, sir, is Jim, the Sport, at your service," the sport returned dryly, "and if you will have the kindness to put yourself on your guard I will endeavor to administer to you the punishment the young lady recommends!"

"Not here!" Gardner retorted. "Come up in front of the hotel where the crowd can enjoy the sport, as well as myself."

"Oh! certainly! Between us we will try to amuse them, if that is what you desire. Lead off, sir."

"Hold on, a moment!" Martha said, reaching for her hat. "I must witness this contest, as it is of some importance to me. Will you loan me your arm?"

"With pleasure, Miss McKandlass," Jim replied, gallantly; and accordingly Martha took his arm, and they sauntered up the gulch street, toward the Big Injun Hotel, Ernest Gardner keeping some distance in advance.

He was in a rage, because of Martha's seeking Jim's escort—a fact which the sport could but notice.

"It appears as if you were trying to see how jealous you can make the fellow!" he observed, looking down into the charming face of his companion.

"Not at all!" Martha replied. "I do not

like him, and hit upon this method as about the only one that would make him indifferent to my society. He is very conceited, and if he were rightly handled it would make him ashamed to approach me again."

"Still, at the same time, you might incur his life-long enmity."

"Oh! I guess not. He wouldn't care a fig for me if he could get hold of my property; and a man of that kind I do not deem a dangerous foe."

"Well, you are a queer one!"

"So I am. I do not deny it. Eccentricity, in a measure, is my happiness. When I select a husband—for you see I intend to secure one—I choose one with whom I can always be happy, for I shall adore him—not for a time, but for all time."

"Then, no doubt, he will be a lucky dog, as the saying goes, that wins you."

"My husband will not have to put himself to the exertion of winning me—I will find him, first, and then win him, myself. He will not have a word to say about it. And I may as well admit that I believe you are the nearest to my ideal, I have met, yet."

"Indeed! Then, I beg, if that is the case, you will not seek to exert any influence over me, for I am not at liberty to accept or give any proffers of money."

"What! Are you married?"

"Oh! no."

"But are going to be, eh?"

"That is my present intention. In fact, it was to perfect some little arrangements that brought me here, to Wake-Up."

"I am sorry. I think I could love you, without half-trying. Do not get married, yet, but remain here, in Wake-Up. I believe you would soon change your mind. Don't you?"

"Why, I am sure I don't know. I rather guess you're inclined to coquetry, not?"

"Not by any means. I despise anything like that. I am frank, candid, and out-and-out with what I have to say. If I were in love with you, I should not hesitate nor consider it unwomanly to tell you so. That I have taken a sudden interest in you, I am already prepared to acknowledge."

"Although I can but feel flattered at your words, Miss McKandlass, I beg you will look further and seek a better man than I," Jim the Sport said, seeing that he must do something, so as to not get within a possibility of forgetting other obligations. "I am counted a bad man, and am even unfitted to be in your society, at the present moment. Although it may not be known to you, I am a road-agent, and a commander of road-agents, and in other parts there are rewards offered for me, I having never operated hereabouts. So you see it would be folly for you to think twice of a man of my character!"

The confession evidently cooled her ardor, for she was silent a moment before she made answer.

"Who is this one you propose to marry?" she finally asked.

"A homeless waif, who is known as Foghorn Fan. Her real name is Fannie Gardner, I believe!"

Martha uttered a little gasp—that was all! They had reached the Big Injun Hotel by this time, and Ernest Gardner was waiting for them.

CHAPTER V. TREACHERY.

JIM THE SPORT glanced curiously into the face of Martha McKandlass, at her manifestation of surprise, and although the girl was a trifle pale, there was nothing else to betray that she felt any special concern at the announcement of her rival's name.

Still he felt satisfied that the name had given her a start, and as soon as possible he meant to inquire the reason.

The voice of Ernest Gardner called him from a slight reverie to a proper sense of his situation.

"Come, jerk off yer coat, you loafer, if you don't want it hammered off!" he cried. "You'll find you've tackled one of the worst jobs you ever heard of, I fancy!"

"Oh, I guess not!" Jim replied, composedly. "The evening is too cool for shirt-sleeve exercise, isn't it? and then, too, I don't have to remove a stitch to stand up to a man like you!"

"Don't you? Well, we'll soon see. Square off, my posy!"

They did step nearer each other, and assumed an attitude that proved they were well-versed in pugilistic exercise.

A good-sized crowd had now gathered and were looking on wonderingly.

"Oh, they mean business!" Martha declared. "The man who wins is entitled to me as his prize, you can bet! Go at it, gents; no tame taps now, but genuine knocks. When the losing man is out, be sure his eyes are painted black, as a sign that he is in mourning for what he has lost."

The opponents now began to spar, while the spectators looked on eagerly.

Ernest Gardner was none too popular among a class of them, through the fact of his being too "stuck up," while, on the other hand, he was feared and respected by some, most of whom he had subdued at fisticuffs, being acknowledged the most skilled man in Wake-Up, so far as the "manly art" was concerned.

Would he conquer this unknown opponent?

It was a point that no one was prepared to "gamble on," as the two were going at their work carefully and systematically, trying to "feel" each other's weak points.

Finally, Jim led out with a left-hander, which Gardner was unable to stop, and it caught him upon the left optic, staggering him.

He attempted to return the blow, but only succeeded in catching one himself from the sport's right.

Jim having gained this much advantage, began to force the fighting, putting his adversary wholly on the defensive.

And a very weak and poor defense it was.

The way the sport put in the blows, right and left-handed, was a surprise to all the spectators. Scarcely a blow of the iron-armed sport could Gardner stop. His eyes were both blackened

and nearly swollen shut, and his face was beginning to assume a beefsteaky appearance, when a sledge-hammer blow from Jim's fist landed him upon his back, and he found himself too used-up to arise.

He was indeed a sad-looking spectacle as he lay there, in a crouching position, as thoroughly whipped as any man need want to be.

"Curses upon you!" he cried. "If I don't make you sorry for this night's job, my name is not Ernest Gardner."

"Then you had better give it out publicly that your name is not Ernest Gardner," the sport replied, turning away.

"Whoa'p, thar! Doan't be in a hurry. Wait fer ther kerryvan, stranger!" and down into the crowd, from the veranda of the Big Injun, came tumbling Mr. Slumgallion Sloat, the individual who had never seen a woman.

As he landed upon his feet, he squarely confronted Jim, his face distorted by a tremendous grin.

"That's the ticket!" he continued. "Don't git in a hurry, please. Ye war jest goin' ter slide off, like a zephyr on a streak o' sunshine, but I say nix!"

Jim, the Sport, regarded the fellow a moment grimly.

"See here!" he finally demanded, "what do you mean, my man? Step aside and allow me to pass."

"No, I'll be darned ef I will," Sloat answered. "You're the werry persimmons I'm gunnin' fer, an' don't yer fergit it. Stranger, I'm a galoot from 'way back—I'm a livin' cooriosity, I am, an' come hyer ter Wake-Up fer ther sole purpose o' seein' a live, real woman. Never see'd one afore, I'll swear, 'cause I was born when I was quite young, an' hev lived in the wilderness ever since. An' neow, as I take it that yonder critter who had hold o' yer oar war a *bona-fide* specimen o' w'ot I'm lu'kin' fer, I want yer to schottische me up an' give me an interdooce. My name's Slumgallion Sloat, an' I'm a feller who never see'd a woman!"

"Then, you'd better go to Salt Lake City!" Jim replied. "Yonder young lady, I dare say, will not care to be introduced to a rum-soaked lout like you. So, do you take good care to keep your distance from her, or I'll serve you worse than the would-be pugilist yonder."

"She's dangerous, then?"

"I'm dangerous!"

"An' she's a real *bony-fide* woman?"

"The Simon-pure article!"

A long, curious stare the bullwhacker took at Martha; then turned away as if satisfied, muttering:

"Waal, I'll be darned. She beats the Dutch!"

His amazement seemed genuine; his curiosity satisfied.

He had seen a woman, and was satisfied to return to his former haunts.

So thought many of the crowd.

But Jim did not.

He regarded the fellow as an impostor, so far as what he represented himself to be was concerned, and at once formed the suspicion that his visit to Wake-Up was for another purpose than what he claimed.

"I'll keep an eye on him at any rate," he mused. "If he's not disguised, he may be a ~~at~~, or right. If he is disguised, the chances are that he may be looking for a man of about my size."

He at once sought the hotel, for he was in ~~the~~ ^{her} ink barry to meet Martha again, after her out ^{alarm}, ~~the~~ spoken declaration of admiration for him. Should he throw himself in her way, she was ~~st~~. "So generously impulsive of nature that there was ~~no~~ ^{why,} telling but what she might demand him. ^{Wake-U} and he would have a hard time to shake her ~~am~~ off.

Having some purchases to make in Wake-Up, ~~like~~ ^{her} which would preclude the possibility of his ~~leaving~~ making an early start back for his mountain ~~re~~ ^{array} treat, he registered at the Big Injun for the ~~night~~ ^{"Ab} as John Smith, and lounged about the ~~more,~~ ^{"Yo} office for a while to smoke a cigar.

While paying no particular attention to the fact, he became aware that he was the target for many pairs of eyes. Some of the bolder toughs even paused to stare him in the face, in a manner most insolent; but he paid no attention to this impertinence for awhile, until it was offered repeatedly, the last man being Jake Grab; then throwing away his cigar, the sport arose quietly from his chair.

"Well, sir, what do you want?" he demanded. "Do you see anything about me you would like to have?"

Grab's face flamed savagely in an instant.

"I reckon we don't want none o' yer lip around hyer!" he growled. "Ye'r a s'picious character, anyhow, and if you don't look keerful—well—"

"Well, what?"

"It will go hard with you."

"Thanks for your warning. If I should be called upon to turn up my toes, when I don't know anything about the occurrence, just remember I thanked you for your timely warning. There's nothing like gratitude, in this world, for favors done!"

Coolly complacent, and yet with apparent earnestness, the sport uttered his words, and the effect upon the bully was surprising, even to himself.

Grab regarded him a moment as if he would, literally, like to make a meal out of him—then, without forewarning, he marched over to the table, and took a seat opposite the sport.

"Now, see here!" he said, slowly. "D'ye know I ruther admire yer gall?"

"Do you? Why, I am glad to hear that. What particular branch of it seems to strike you so favorably?"

"Yer cheek in comin' here so boldly to this camp, an' exposin' yer life, as ef it warn't worth ther livin' fer!"

"Ab! is that so? But, my dear sir, are you positive that my advent to this camp is at my personal peril, and if so, why?"

Grab laughed gruffly.

"You're a cool one!" he declared. "That's what I admire about you. Don't yer s'pose ye'r known?"

"Oh! possibly. I registered over yonder a bit ago. Perhaps a score or so of your towns-men may have scanned the register since."

"Pshaw! Cheese on thinking I'm so green as

ite," he be a lat, or ther other pilgrims o' Wake-Up, fer re tha lat matter. We know ye'r Jim the Sport, ye out me, an' that 'John Smith' racket ain't worth yer ink ye wasted on it!"

The sport gave no evidence of surprise or alarm, but tossed his informant a cigar, and lit him up himself. "So the 'Smith' racket didn't work, eh? e way, that's queer! Where did the people o' him Wake-Up get all their advice, to the effect that e he am not John Smith?"

"Easy enough. Ernest Gardner has got ears like a hawk, and he heerd ye tell Old Maid his Martha who ye were."

"Ah! he did, eh?"

"You bet! He ain't no lover o' yours any

the more, since ye done him up."

"Perhaps not. I suppose, accordingly, the citizens of Wake-Up are gathering in warlike array, for the purpose of capturing—"

"You bet! They ain't goin' ter go fer ye, openly, however—they're too 'feard, I allow, fer yer reputation as a double-distilled cuss on wheels, ain't foreighn, even to this camp. They're goin' ter lay fer ye, when ye'r' least thinkin' about it, an' take ye as neat as a pin. That's jest what they're goin' ter do."

"So you say; but, pray tell, what will I be doing all this time?"

"Nary a thing."

"I cannot comprehend how that will be possible, I am sure."

"Mebbe not. Ye'r' hyer in Wake-Up, an' ye couldn't get out o' et ter save yer gizzard."

"Ah! I see. They've got an ambush laying for me."

"Dunno, I'm sure. Et ain't nothing ter me, nohow. I allow I orter be with ther gang, but I ain't, an' they'd spill me ef they knew I was playin' 'em crooked."

"Then you are playing them crooked?"

"You bet!"

"For what reason?"

"It's a secret jest at present. Ye needn't book on me as an angel, fer I ain't nothin' o' the sort. I'm a bad man, wi' blood in my eye, every time—but, nevertheless, not all bad. I've got a record fer bein' a common cut-throat, that'll compare purty well wi' any o' ther boyees. Still, I once in a while do a little turn that's out o' my regular line o' biz."

"Well! Please be more brief, if you have anything much of importance to communicate!"

"Oh! don't be in a hurry. It don't pay. Now, don't ye look around, when I tell ye that a score o' rifles aire leveled at ye, from the windows of this shebang!"

"Go on!"

"These rifles cover ye, and an attempt on yer part ter leave this office would see ye riddled wi' bullets."

"Yes?"

"You bet! The boys have worked it cute, an' got ye foul."

"And, accordingly, I can consider myself a prisoner."

"Yes, temporarily. Ye see I am ther sheriff o' this hyer town, an' I war sent in hyer ter draw ye inter conversation, and watch me chance ter get the drop on ye. Then, the boys will come ter my aid, snatch ye, and hustle ye off to the

jug, where you will stay, till sunrise, when you will be the principal of a necktie party."

"That's the plan, is it?"

"That's their plan. Mine is different!"

"It is?"

"You bet. The same plan, up ter the time we jug ye. Then, it changes."

"In what respect?"

"Why, you don't stay in the jug till mornin', ner ye don't stretch hemp. When all's on the quiet, to-night, I'll release you, an' we'll skedaddle for your stronghold."

Jim regarded the bully, searchingly. He was a pretty good judge of human nature, and while Grab appeared to be perfectly candid, in his statements, it struck Jim as being rather an unnatural confidence for a man of his character.

"I hardly see why you should do anything of this sort!" the sport therefore said. "You're not the man to do a stranger such a favor—especially a stranger with a reward on his head."

"There's where you're wrng. As I told you, I have a secret object for setting you at liberty. When we are safe away from Wake-Up, I'll make et known ter ye. Will ye trust me?"

The bully met the sport's gaze, fearlessly.

But a moment Jim hesitated, then he assented:

"Yes. Go on with your plans. Woe be unto you, however, if you are treacherous."

"Never fear!" Grab said, suddenly leveling a cocked revolver at the sport's head.

At the same instant, Jim was surrounded by men, from different parts of the room, and after a short struggle, which was play on his part, he was made a prisoner.

No sooner where his hands and feet securely bound than Jake Grab leaped upon the table and swung his hat in the air, with a wild exultant yell.

"Hooray! hooray! Who sed I warn't the high-cockolorum o' Wake-Up? Who sed I couldn't capter ther ragin' lion, w'ot ev'ry one else was afeerd of? Hey, Jim, ye darlin', didn't I do et up brown, and skientific? You bet I did! Thor't I war reformin' an' becomin' a sweet-scented five-cent saint, didn't ye? Haw! haw! haw! Ther ignorance o' wise men aire 'stonishin'. Fetch a rope, somebody—a nice strong lariat, an' we'll

"Hang Jim The Sport
Ter a big maple tree,"

etc, and so-forth!"

The crowd gave a yell of assent, and Jim no longer had a doubt but what he had blindly become a victim of Grab's treachery!

CHAPTER VI. FANNIE.

FAR up among the mountains, almost overlooking the camp of Wake-Up, was a great level plateau, accessible upon but one side, the remaining sides dropping 'off into abrupt precipice and mountain gulch.

Here, upon this plateau, Jim the sport had pitched his stronghold, and gathered around him a set of fearless fellows, the majority of whom had, by some past-and-gone offense, alienated themselves from the haunts of civilization, and were, as they believed, lost in their

wild surroundings, and in the life they were leading.

The camp had been located there but a few days prior to Jim's appearance in Wake-Up; still, on the late afternoon of that day, it presented an appearance of camp-life that was peculiarly attractive to the eye.

The plateau comprised several acres, and instead of being barren rock, was covered with a coating of greensward, which furnished ample grazing for several pairs of horses, who were hobbled, and lariated out, together.

Upon the plateau were half a dozen lodges, built in Indian fashion, in a semicircle, looking off toward the eastern declivity.

One of the six was much larger than the others, and on the afternoon of which we write, the flap was pulled aside, and in the entrance was seated a young woman, engaged in watching the sportive antics of the followers of Jim the Sport.

An even score of these there were, scattered about the plateau—men of fine physique, dressed in dark suits, top-boots and sombreros, with half-masks of a like color concealing the upper part of their features.

They were engaged in an afternoon's frolic. Some were wrestling, others were jumping, others engaged in gymnastics, or other out-door games.

A cool breeze swept across the plateau, lessening the summer heat, and each of the band appeared thoroughly to enter into the spirit of the sport.

The young woman in the tent doorway seemed barely out of her teens. She possessed a pretty face and figure, had a luxuriant wealth of brown hair, liquid brown eyes, and a mouth of rare sweetness. She was plainly yet neatly attired in a maroon-colored dress, and wore but a few simple ornaments at her fair throat, and in her hair—yet looked most attractive.

She was greatly enjoying the sport, as was evidenced by a merry peal of laughter from her lips when some of the men would have a clumsy tumble or other mishap.

The men, too, seemed to vie with each other in creating pleasantry for her.

There was but one tortuous route to the plateau, and this being always guarded, the band had no fear of being surprised.

"Ain't we having great fun, Miss Fanny?" cried one handsome fellow, as he approached the tent. "I tell you it does the boys good to get woke up once in a while. It takes 'em back to their younger days you know, when they were not the men they are, now."

"You are right, lieutenant. I am glad to see you enjoying yourselves. I wish the sport were here, to enjoy it, too."

"Oh! he'll not be back to night—he told me so. I suppose he has gone after the bridal ring and the minister, to put on your finger to-morrow night—I mean, of course, the ring, for your finger!"

Foghorn Fan, as she had once been known, laughed and blushed.

"Oh! I suppose so. I only hope he won't fall in love with some one else while he is gone, and leave me forsaken and forgotten."

"No danger of that, I guess. Jim the Sport's

as square as a cube, and I'll swear by that all the time. In fact, all the boys are good sorts o' fellows, with one exception."

"Ah! there is an exception, then?"

"Yes—that fellow, over yonder, lying on the grass, who wears the jetty beard. I don't like him, a bit. He's very mum-tongued, and when he does speak, it's in a sort of overbearing way."

"Why, I don't remember of noticing him."

"Oh! Jim just brought him to camp, last evening. Don't know where he picked him up. Anyhow, I judge he will bear watching."

"Then, see that he gets it. What does he call himself?"

"Israel Brown. He looks like a sheeney, but talks too good 'States to be one. I've noticed he kept a kind o' sly, sneakish one-eyed watch on your tent, all the time, and that's what caused me to dislike him."

And, with this, the lieutenant turned away, to join in the sports again.

Foghorn Fan watched the new member for a time, but seeing nothing about him to cause her any uneasiness, re-entered the tent, where she threw herself upon a couch of skins, and buried her face in her hands.

In this attitude, she remained for some time, as if in deep reflection.

When she exposed her face to view again, it wore a haggard sort of expression.

"Oh! what am I doing—what am I doing?" she murmured. "Am I making myself any happier? Oh! that I could answer that, to my satisfaction. I love him—ay, my life would now be a worse blank than ever, without him—and he loves me. But, will he not love less, or cease to care for me at all, when he learns the truth? Will he ever learn the truth—oh! how I could wish 'twere not possible! But, I feel sure he will find out everything. Knowing this, shall I wreck his happiness by marrying him, or shall I go and hurl myself off the precipice yonder, and end all? Oh! God, that I but knew what to do!"

She once more buried her face in her hands and sobbed—not aloud, but bitterly.

When she finally raised her head a slight scream burst from her lips, but it was one of joy.

"Luga! Luga!" she uttered, and sprung to her feet, with extended hands.

Within the tent, gazing sorrowfully toward her, stood an Indian woman, or perhaps more appropriately a half-breed, for her features betrayed that the blood of the pale-face mingled with that of the red-man in her veins.

She was older by ten years than Fanny, and not by any means bad-looking. She had an intelligent face and eye, and her semi-civilized costume was neat and clean.

"Luga has come!" she said, receiving Fanny's outstretched hands.

"Oh! I am so glad. I was expecting you, and gave orders for your admittance to the pictu're. You bring me news?"

"Yes."

"You disposed of the child as I instructed?"

"Yes."

"Thank God! It will be cared for—I am sure of that. What else?"

"Luga has been on a journey. She hunted a long trail and found the right man."

"Quick! what did he say?"

The girl was trembling violently, and in a great state of excitement.

"His name was Leander?"

"Yes—yes! Paul Leander."

"Then, all is well. The child is yours. He is and has been for years a true minister of the Gospel, and has the right to marry people."

"God be praised! I am then the wife of Seth Steele!"

"You are. Luga not only obtained for you a statement, but she did more; she found Steele in the mountains, and stole from him the certificate of your marriage."

"Great joy! The wretch! the monster! He possessed it all the time, then?"

"Yes. The reason he denied you was because he had just learned that a fortune was left to him, which will soon come into his possession."

"Then, matters are becoming clearer. After my child was born, and I crept back to my father to seek his forgiveness and protection—"

"It was Seth Steele that put the poison in the glass of water, that your father brought and forced you to drink, when you were in a swoon because he had refused to receive you back again."

Foghorn Fan listened, her eyes riveted upon the ground.

What glad news this was to her!

It seemed to fill her with a strange ecstasy; she felt the blood rushing to her temples, and a strong, ringing sensation in her ears.

Then for a time her senses seemed to leave her, and all was blank.

When she recovered consciousness, all was dark within her tent and Luga was gone.

Then, gradually, came back to her what she had heard, and raising her gaze to heaven she fervently thanked God she was no longer an outcast.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOLF QUEEN.

LUGA had left the lodge long before Foghorn Fan arose from her faint; in fact, she left shortly after the girl swooned.

She was permitted to pass the guards without question, and going out through the narrow and shallow gap which communicated with the plateau, she hastened down the precipitous mountain-side.

Directly below her, hundreds of feet, nestled the "bowlin' town of Wake-Up."

She did not go thither, however. Her route ran in a course that must bring her miles from the mining-camp into a lower gulch.

No Alpine guide could have threaded the rugged trail more cleverly; she was both sure of foot and swift.

The sun's last rays had not ceased to kiss the higher peaks when she reached a rude but comfortable hut, built in a mountain-side niche and overhung by a wide ledge of slate.

In fact, all there was of the hut was the thatched front, the rocks furnishing the remaining walls and roof.

Opening the rude door, she entered.

The furniture, consisting of a rough table and

a couple of stools, had evidently been manufactured by herself.

There were plenty of skins about the place—hundreds of them, fur-tanned, and all wolf-skins; also a few cooking-utensils, peculiar to camp life.

Seating herself at the table, Luga took some dried venison from a box hung up on the wall as a cupboard. This meat she chipped with a knife and partook of with relish, completing her repast with a cup of "fire-water," of which she had a small demijohn.

She then arose, and began a careful search under each skin that covered the rocky floor.

At last her efforts were rewarded, and she brought to light two documents, each one being enveloped.

"These may not be safe here," she said, audibly. "The one is the statement of Paul Leander, that he did marry Seth Steele and Francis Gardner; the other is the certificate of the marriage, which I stole from Steele's trunk. How he would like to get hold of either of these and destroy them! But he shall not. I will take care of them and the innocent babe too. If he is in this vicinity, as I half-believe, it is on purpose to kill Fanny, and perhaps the babe, in order that neither may ever appear to share his fortune, or to prevent his marrying again."

Luga was shrewd. She had been reared and educated in a white family, and yet was possessed of the Indian's keen instincts.

She was noble-hearted, too, and had been a true friend to Foghorn Fan.

The history of the latter, in connection with the Gardners of Wake-Up, can be briefly told as well here, as later.

After the Gardners had settled in Wake-Up, Fanny, the only daughter, had made the acquaintance of a dashing young army lieutenant, Seth Steele by name. She being young, Gerald Gardner objected to her keeping company; but as lovers will do, they met clandestinely, and eventually were married on the sly.

Fanny confessed to being Steele's wife.

That there might be no doubt, Gerald Gardner accompanied her to Steele, whereupon the lieutenant positively denied the marriage or any knowledge, and challenged the parent to produce proof.

A stern man was Gerald Gardner, and he bade Fanny go forth, never to return.

She did so, but months later, Fanny crept back in the dead of night to beg her father's forgiveness.

The next morning the report was circulated that Fanny had committed suicide at her father's house. No one was permitted to view her remains, however, and she was buried.

Luga dug her up in the dead of night, and resuscitated her, and she went forth on the world, to be known no more around Wake-Up, until we see her with Jim the Sport.

All that Fanny had been able to tell Luga, after being resuscitated, was that she visited her father, and begged him to take her back. This he refused to do, when she felt dizzy, and he brought her a drink, which tasted very bitter. After that, she knew no more, and held to the theory that her father had poisoned her.

The brave half-breed had never exactly given

up to this theory, however, and had sought long and far, with the result she had announced to Fanny, at the mountain camp.

The papers she now held in her hand she well knew Seth Steele would give much to possess.

Why he had not destroyed the certificate was more than the half-breed woman could fathom.

"Yes, he would venture much to get them, and he will venture much to find Fanny, and the baby!" she said, as she put the papers in her bosom. "He shall never find out anything from me. But, I must away. I have other work yet before I sleep."

She armed herself with a brace of revolvers, two knives and a rifle; then, throwing a wolf-skin robe about her figure, she left the hut and hurried away.

An hour afterward, as she neared Wolf Run, she paused and listened.

Not a sound except a stirring of the foliage broke the silence of the night which was now settling down over Mother Earth.

"The wolves are late to-night!" she muttered. "They are not coming as early as usual, since I conquered old Fire Fang. They miss him and fear me."

A quiet laugh broke from her lips as she uttered these words.

The wolves seemed to be no terror to her.

The solitary howl of a wolf was now heard in the distance; but an entirely different sound attracted her hearing. It was a human cry, and that of—

"Help, help! for God's sake, or I shall be torn to pieces!"

She sped forward, and, in a few seconds, was where the human Wolves of Wake-Up had planted Gerald Gardner.

"For Heaven's sake, quick! Contrive to get me out!" he gasped. "I am nearly dead, and the brutes will soon be here."

"Fear not for them!" she replied, calmly. "I am Luga, and their queen. They will not harm you, when Luga is here!"

She then set to work to extricate him.

CHAPTER VIII.

JIM WINS THE PRIZE.

To return to Wake-Up, and the situation enveloping Jim, the Sport.

Yes, the sport realized only too keenly that he had been "taken in, and done up," by the bully 'of that mountain town, and for the moment it literally made the blood boil in his veins.

Deliberation, however, brought to him the old saying about not crying over spilled milk, and he knew it was necessary to steel himself to meet the inevitable result of his capture, for he saw plainly that it was the intention of the roughs to lynch him.

"Well, gentlemen, you have the cowardly disadvantage over me!" he said, speaking as coolly as if he were attending to a subject of no particular moment. "Though I am for the time being helplessly at your mercy, it does me proud to take notice that you had to resort to a sneakish and treacherous act to take me!"

"Don't ye sling out no hints that I'm a cow-

ard!" roared Jake Grab, "or by the howlin' catamount, I'll climb ye sooner'n ye know fer."

"You are a coward and a cur, and I could clean you out with one hand!"

For a moment Grab looked mad enough to resort to violence; then, his brute cunning obtained the mastery, and he chuckled, softly:

"Ohol! Wouldn't we be green ter let yer hev use o' yer paws ag'in?" he leered. "No, sir, there ain't strategy enuff in your whole kerkass ter git yer free. Has any galoot found a rope, yet?"

Some galoot had, and produced it.

Without delay, the noose was stirred about the sport's neck, and he was carried bodily out of the hotel.

No trees grew in Wake-Up, suitable to the requirements of Judge Lynch, and, therefore, that there might be no absence of the Western, time-honored sport of hanging, a tall post had been planted in the street, with a cross-piece spiked near the top, which offered every reasonable facility for launching a man into eternity.

Beneath this grim, outstretching arm, Jim was conducted, just as the shadows of nightfall were gathering thick and fast.

Some one more liberal than the rest, suggested that a bonfire ought to be built, to give the prisoner light, but the majority did not think so.

The rope was hurled over the arm, and seized and drawn taut, by a dozen pairs of hands; then, Jake Grab posed himself before the prisoner, with an importance in keeping with the fact of his being "sheriff" of the town.

"Jim the Sport!" he said, "it becomes our duty ter stretch yer swan-like throat for pilferin' stages an' sech like. Hed ye been guilty o' sum lesser crime, sech as cuttin' throats, or shutin', why et wouldn't go so hard wi' ye. But, hoss-stealin' aire the greatest in the cullender, an' road-robbin' aire on ther same level. Tharfore, duty comwels us ter yank ye. Say yer prayers, quick! One, two—"

"Stop!" cried a commanding voice. "What does this mean?" And Martha McKandlass rushed in upon the scene.

"It means that this feller is Jim, the road-agent, and we're goin' ter raise him! So ef yer nerves ain't very strong you had better skin out!" Grab declared, regarding the girl sharply.

"You are not going to hang him!" Martha retorted. "You shall not hang him. He is the man I have picked out for my husband, and you shall not harm a hair of his head."

"Won't we? Ef he's yer choice that's all ther more reason why we will hang him."

"But I say you won't! As you all know I am in the market. Release that prisoner and guarantee that no harm shall come to him while he chooses to remain in Wake-Up, and I will give each of you a chance to win me for a wife. The man that wins me I will marry!"

The crowd stared in utter surprise and silence.

Eccentric as she was noted for being, this was one of Martha's most extraordinary freaks.

For a moment, seemingly, the crowd could not believe the evidence of their senses.

"Ye don't mean it?" Grab demanded, incredulously.

"I do mean it—every word of it, too. By foregoing your contemplated vengeance on this man I give you each a chance to win me."

"Ther sport included, I s'pose?"

"Certainly."

"How der ye propose ter do it?"

"Easy enough. I hold in my hand twenty-five matches, each one of a different length. The ends toward you are all even—the palm of my hands conceal the length of the other ends from your view. First, twenty-five of you form in line, and as I pass along, you each draw a match. Whichever draws the shortest, steps out by himself and the line falls back. Another and different line of men then forms and another drawing occurs, and the second man steps out. Thus the drawing progresses, until every man present has drawn a match. The short-match men then form in line and the final drawing takes place. Whoever draws the shortest match I will marry."

Fearlessly Martha faced the crowd, which had by this time swelled to a couple of hundred—rough, bearded men, with but a few exceptions.

The brave girl seemed to be dead in earnest—she was making the novel self-sacrifice, to save Jim.

Jake Grab seemed to favor the idea, as was evidenced by the eager gleam in his bloodshot eyes.

"Boys, aire et a go?" he demanded. "Hyer's a fair an' squar' chance at speckilation, an' little chance fer cheatin'. Who gits the gal, gits a gold mine, an' at ther cost o' lettin' ther prisoner off scot free!"

"There is no chance for cheating whatever," Martha declared.

"S'pose Jim the Sport wins?" Grab demanded, hesitatingly.

"Just the same as though you won—he is entitled to me for his wife. Another part of the understanding is, that no matter who is the winner, Jim goes free, and you all shake the winner's hand in hearty good-fellowship, and envy him not his luck, but rather congratulate him upon it!"

There was a cheer at this.

Martha McKandlass, plainly, had won the day and not only that, but the good-nature of those dark-spirits of Wake-Up's grim camp.

She had by this bold act of self-sacrifice snatched the Gold-Gatherer from the jaws of death.

Would he thank her for it?

Without the shadow of a doubt!

But in case he should win? What then?

She glanced at him and saw such an expression upon his face as she had never seen before—an expression wherein was depicted surprise at her action, admiration for her grit, gratitude for her interest in him, regret at being drawn into such an affair, and anxiety lest he should be the winner!

"Boyees, et's as fair as the wag o' a dog's tail!" Grab decided. "I'm in fer it, I am, an' I allow all o' ye aire. Ain't I right?"

"As a top!" roared Slumgallion Sloat, who had been taking in matters with open-mouthed amazement. "My opinion o' women aire a hundred pegs more elervated than ever before,

tho' darn my socks ef I ever invest in 'em. Grit! why ther durned critters hev got more backbone than a biffler, an' a young filly like that thar—why, by ther silver-sand jigs of old Saint Vitus, I wouldn't risk my auburn ringlets wi'in her reach for ther best burro in Arizona!"

"S'posin' ye win her—what then?" snickered a miner.

"What? Great gimlets o' Gasconsa! I'll put her up at auction, and knock her off ter ther highest bidder, an' invest ther proceeds in bug-juice, I wil!"

The crowd, in answer to Jake Grab's query, gave back a ringing cheer.

There was not a dissenting voice, the acceptance and enthusiasm were epidemic.

"That point is settled," Martha said, quietly. "Now, gentlemen, release Jim. Road-agent though you claim he is, he has never done anything to harm you, and I desire to see you all enter into a spirit of good fellowship before you take part in this contest!"

The dozen pairs of hands let loose the rope, that would have sent Jim into eternity, and other hands quickly released him of the thongs that bound his hands and feet.

When this was done Martha signified her approval.

"So far, good. Now then, twenty-five of you men form in line, and let's get through with this lottery business as soon as possible."

Her tone was apparently buoyant, and her spirits high.

Jim knew better, however. He detected a trifle of pallor upon her cheeks, and a nervousness about her that perhaps no one else saw.

Was she depending—hoping beyond hope—that he would win?

It occurred to him that way, and in spite of himself, he felt a strong sense of pity for her.

The men eagerly formed in line, apparently anxious to know their fate.

The first drawing took place.

The best of order was a feature of the affair, and good nature seemed to prevail at either hand.

The first short stick was drawn by Jake Grab.

"Hip! hooray!" he yelled, executing a somerset. "Emblazon et on ther escutcheon o' ther soarin' eagle that Jacob Grab are goin' ter become a Benedict!"

There was a loud laugh at this.

The first line fell back, and a second one was formed.

This drawing allotted the short stick to Slumgallion Sloat!

The toughs of Wake-Up were seemingly in luck.

The third drawing then took place, and there was a murmur not exactly of satisfaction, when it became known that Jim had drawn the short match!

In the fourth drawing a miner won.

So in the fifth.

The same result in the sixth.

The seventh drawing Ernest Gardner was in the line, and—won!

The eighth drawing absorbed all of the men who had congregated in the street.

It was won by the local real estate and insur-

ance agent, one Potiphar—Adolphus Potiphar, a very meek-appearing man, with glittering eyes and an attenuated black-clothed figure.

Potiphar was the man who had paid over to Gerald Gardner the two insurance moneys.

There was an outbreak of excitement now.

The eight men were next to draw for the short match. Who would be the lucky winner? That was the question, and one of vital importance to at least one of the crowd, and that one Martha McKandlass.

Although holding her excitement and anxiety under restraint, it was evident that she was exceedingly nervous; but she had proposed the sacrifice, and all who knew her believed she would carry it out. She was just that kind of a girl.

All except Jim. He found it hard to believe that, should the lucky man be some disgusting ruffian like Slumgallion Sloat, she could bring herself down to the level of marrying him.

"The final drawing now!" she said. "Jim is a free citizen, and I have successfully accomplished my purpose. The man who wins now is the winner of the bride!"

"Then toot ther trombones, an' set ther bells a-ringin'!" bowled Jake Grab; "fer I am ther man who is goin' ter carry off ther prize, you bet!"

"Ten ter one ye don't!" roared Sloat. "Et will be jest my consarned luck, an' don't ye fer git it!"

There was no telling. It might be one or the other of the ruffians.

The eight contestants formed in line, and after arranging the matches, Martha passed slowly before the line, and permitted each man to draw one match.

Who was the victor?

Could there be but one victor among those wild spirits?

Jim, the Sport, held up the shortest match!

CHAPTER IX.

THE BABE AT THE COTTAGE.

THERE was an ejaculation then in Wake-Up, as the result became known. It was hardly an expression of joy, on the part of those rude mountain spirits, nor could it exactly be said to be one of anger. Still, it was an expression betraying that the crowd were neither surprised nor well pleased with the result.

There was not an expression of triumph upon the face of Jim, either, as he held up the match; in fact, one would have been inclined to judge, that he was not particularly elated over his success.

The only person who looked pleased was Martha. A great load seemed lifted from her heart, and her face beamed with satisfaction.

"Gentlemen, you have seen the result," she said. "Was not the contest conducted fairly?"

"Yas, I allow it was, but it's a dog-goned shame that that cuss should win!" Jake Grab growled, turning away and entering the bar-room of the hotel, followed by the gang who held to him as their leader.

"Gents, I am not sorry for the part this young lady has played!" Jim said, addressing the remaining miners, "neither am I glad, ex-

cept for the fact that by her act I have been released, and owe her a deep debt of gratitude. As for holding her to the distasteful agreement of wedding the winner, I cannot do that. Sincerely thanking you for your kindness in saving my life, Miss McKandlass, I have the honor of releasing you of any obligation to me, consequent upon your promise."

He spoke clearly, pleasantly, calmly, and the speech was evidently a source of relief to him, rather than regret.

Martha heard him with paling cheek, and bowing, turned quickly away and walked toward her cottage.

She had been dealt a hard blow.

Jim knew it, with a sense of pity and commiseration for her.

The miners knew it, too.

"Thet's a dog-goned shame!" Slumgallion Sloat declared. "She war tickled ter death at yer winnin', stranger, an' now you've gone an' bu'sted her heart."

"'Course it's a shame! He won her, an' he orter be made to marry her!" chimed in several miners.

The opinion appeared to be growing infectious, as the sport turned away and entered the hotel.

He was not prepared to believe that trouble was over yet; still, he had his liberty now, and stood a better show than he had before, when the noose was around his neck.

Seating himself in the office of the hotel, he awaited the result, for he felt that there was a result impending.

The men of Wake-Up were not satisfied with the way things had turned out. One faction felt aggrieved because he had won, and another because he had refused to wed Martha McKandlass.

That either faction had it in will to make him trouble he had no doubt, and it could be but a matter of moments ere the cloud would burst.

An hour passed without any hostile demonstration.

At the expiration of that time, a note was handed him, which read thus:

"JIM:—

"DEAR SIR:—Will you not at least do me the favor of calling before you leave camp? M. M."

He bit his lip with vexation. He would rather have entered a battle than go before her, well knowing what would be the character of the interview.

Then he remembered that it had been she who had saved his life, and he would be showing poor appreciation of his gratitude toward her by refusing the implied request.

"Well, if I must, I must!" he muttered, grimly. "It has got to be done. I must steel myself against her, however, or there is no telling what may happen."

Then he arose, left the hotel, and sauntered away toward the cottage. Strange glances followed him, and not a few that were not friendly, to say the least. He paid no attention to them, however, but continued on without looking back, and soon reached the McKandlass homestead.

Martha was seated in the doorway as he approached the porch, and greeted his arrival with a pleasant smile.

"I am glad you have come, for I wished to disabuse you of any impression you might have that I was unwomanly enough to desire you to marry me, a mere stranger to you," she said, coming to the point at once with a frankness that pleased him. "Such is not the case. When I placed an advertisement in the *Warwhoop* for a husband, I did it more out of a joke than anything else, being known to every one here, and of course believing that no one would take any bad meaning out of it. No one did so, but it brought me hosts of would-be suitors, and caused me to wish I had never done such a silly thing."

"I understand, Miss McKandlass. No explanation is necessary."

"But, I insist that there is. You do not understand—you do not know anything about me. I am an eccentric girl, they say, and without a doubt they are quite right. I am odd, and am not ashamed of it. After I had taken the step I had, I resolved that, should a man of my choice come along, and prove himself worthy, I would take him for better or worse. You came at a moment when the man I most detest was trying my patience sorely, and some impulse caused me to inveigle you into giving him the thrashing I know he richly deserved, for I believe him a villain of the deepest dye. After that I came home, but soon learned of the dire extremity you were in, and made up my mind to effect your rescue at all hazards. The result is known to you. I do not believe any other plan I could have devised would have saved your life."

"Perhaps not, and you will ever have my sincere gratitude for the dangerous as well as heroic part you played!"

"I do not desire to be thanked for an act like that. And now, as before, I tell you that I could not think of asking you to marry me. It was for no such object that I invited you here, but, on the contrary, to give you a warning!"

"A warning!"

"Yes. You told me that you were to be married to Fanny Gardner?"

"I did."

"Do you know who Fanny Gardner is?"

"Well, no! Her antecedents I have never taken the pains to inquire into. I know that, when I first met her, she was a waif upon the world, but believed her all that was pure and good, and learned to regard her with a feeling no other woman ever aroused in me. Even now, that you have cast a hint against her, I would be loth to believe that she is not what I have always considered her—akin to an angel!"

He spoke earnestly—fervently. There was no doubt but what he meant every word he uttered:

Martha regarded him admiringly.

"I am glad to hear you say so—glad to hear she has so good a friend in you, but it is with regret that I must inform you that you cannot legally marry her."

"Cannot marry her?" he echoed.

His surprise evidently was extreme.

"No, you cannot marry her; at least I judge

you would not be so hasty to do so when you come to know that she has a husband living."

Jim gazed at her, incredulously.

"I find it hard to believe this," he said, his cheeks flushed and manner excited. "You are not, I hope, concocting this story, hoping to injure her in my estimation."

"No, sir! If you would for a moment think such a thing I would feel insulted. What I have said was for your own and her own good, and with no selfish intent. Indeed, Fanny and I were always firm friends—are now, for that matter, and what is a wonder to me is how she could think of such a thing as marrying you, knowing the unpardonable wrong she would be doing."

"Strange! strange!" Jim said, gravely. "Tell me all about this matter, for I must know—I must know all, now."

Martha did so, in a modest way, and with a skillful method of conveying the facts, without necessitating a plain out-and-out statement.

Her story was in substance, however, the same as that known to the reader, except so far as Luga, the half-breed, was concerned. She, of course, knew nothing about Luga's adventures, nor her interest in hunting up the evidence so necessary for establishing Foghorn Fan's honor.

Jim the Sport listened to the recital with interest, his face betraying little of the pain he must naturally have felt.

"Then according to your narrative," he said, when she was done. "Fanny and this Lieutenant Steele were not really married?"

"They were married!" Martha declared, with emphasis. "I am positive of it; I would even wager my life on it. I know Fanny Gardner well, and know she would not do a wrong act. Steele is a villain—a monster in human form, and had some motive for discarding her. Although it was not established that any marriage had taken place, I would be willing to risk my life on it that they were married!"

"How is it that she was dead and buried, and yet lives?" Jim asked. "There is something about this matter that I fail to understand."

"I cannot explain it. If any one can, she can. She was buried, that is sure, but she was—must have been—dug up, and brought back to life—by whom, or by what means, I do not know. All that I know is what I have told you."

"Is this Lieutenant Steele still living?"

"Yes—or, at least, I have never heard of his death. He left Wake-Up, at the time of his refusal to acknowledge Fannie to be his wife, and has not returned since."

"And you say there was a child?"

"Yes. Come inside."

Wondering not a little, the sport obeyed, and was conducted to the only up-stairs room the place afforded, which was modestly furnished.

Upon a bed of pillows, formed upon two chairs, was a sweet-faced baby girl, lying there, wide awake and crowing—a plump, healthy-looking child, with a face that was purely beautiful.

One glance at the babe, and Jim saw that it was Fannie's beyond the shadow of a doubt. In spite of the fact that it was but a trifle over a

year old, the child was the living image of the woman he had pledged to marry, twenty-four hours later.

"This is her babe," Martha said. "I scarce need tell you that, for you can see the great resemblance, yourself."

"How came you in possession of it?"

"It was left here, one day, not long ago, while I had stepped out for a moment. Had I not found this paper pinned to its clothing, I should have known it was her child."

She opened a book, lying upon a chair, and taking a slip of paper from among its leaves, handed it to the sport.

There were but a few words, indited in a woman's graceful style of chirography.

"MARTHA:—For God's sake take in this little stranger and provide for her, until I know what the future has in store, for her and me. FANNIE."

That was all, but it was all-sufficient.

Jim turned to Martha, gratefully, and put out his hand.

"Miss McKandlass," he said, "I am more deeply indebted to you than before, for your act of kindness, in preventing my union to this unfortunate girl. To tell the truth, I do not believe she would have married me, without first having told me the truth. Do you believe she would?"

"I am almost certain she would have told you all, for she is an honorable woman."

"Believing which I shall not discard her as being wholly unworthy, but will do that which will be a remedy!"

"What?"

"Hunt down the villain who has been a curse to her, and force him to meet me at the sword's point, or with pistols!"

Fiercely the sport spoke, and turning, abruptly, descended the stairs, and quitted the cottage.

And Martha, with a failing heart, felt that he was lost to her, even though he could not wed Foghorn Fan!

CHAPTER X.

RESCUED.

THE work of getting Gerald Gardner out of his living tomb occupied Luga, the half-breed, but a few minutes, for she was strong and active, and worked with one of the spades that the Wolves of Wake-Up had left behind.

Once she had succeeded in getting him disinterred, she cut away the bonds that bound him, but found he was temporarily powerless to move until the blood recirculated more freely in his limbs.

In spite of all she could do, it would be several minutes ere he would be able to walk.

The howling of the wolves had by this time become general. They were approaching their meeting ground, from all directions, and would soon be at hand, bloodthirsty and savage.

Gerald Gardner's terror seemed to increase, as he heard their barks.

"We shall be torn to pieces!" he cried. "For God's sake, assist me to a place of safety."

"Fear not!" Luga said calmly. "The wolves

will not harm you, as long as I am about. Luga is their queen and they fear her. Wait till they come and you shall see!"

"I do not want to see—I want to get away from this accursed spot, and that quickly. Can you not carry me, or drag me?—any way, to get away!"

Luga laughed.

"Not no! You are not yet able to walk. Your blood is not in circulation. You must stay with Luga until she gets ready to leave this place. She will guarantee that no harm shall come to you. If she were to leave this meeting-ground now she could never return and regain her power over the wolves."

He shuddered and relapsed into silence, wondering if, after all, the report was true—that a human being mingled with the savage brutes of the forest at will, without being torn to pieces.

Luga set to work preparing, evidently, to receive her wolf audience, for she gathered a number of dry twigs and sticks, and heaping them together, soon had a blaze kindled which partially dissipated the surrounding gloom.

Next, from about her clothing she produced several sticks, similar to those known in pyrotechnics as Roman candles, which, in fact, they really were. She also produced several bunches of cotton and other inflammable material.

All these she deposited handy to the fire, and then awaited the arrival of her ravenous audience.

She had not long to wait. In almost less time than it takes to narrate it, hundreds of gaunt, shaggy forms were surging into the gap, their fiery eyes gleaming fiercely enough to appall the stoutest heart.

Not until they had surged so close that Gerald Gardner momentarily expected to see them leap upon him, did Luga begin her weird incantation scene.

Several of the balls of cotton she thrust into the fire, and then buried them into the midst of the surrounding hordes.

The material being saturated with oil, burst into a lurid flame, and when it descended among the wolves, they scattered with terrified howls and snarls.

Luga laughed wildly as she saw their promiscuous retreat, evidently enjoying it keenly.

Seizing one of the Roman candles, she lit it at the fire, and sent ball after ball of fire into the midst of the shaggy horde, until, with the last ball, there was not a wolf to be seen within sight of the camp-fire!

"That will answer for to-night," she said. "I usually have a longer programme to carry out, but will postpone it on this occasion. Do you think you can walk now?"

"Yes. I can at least try, and that will assist my blood in its circulation."

The attempt was made, and soon proved successful. A few trials, and the power of his lower limbs returned to him.

"There! I feel more like a live man now," he said, "and am very grateful to you for saving my life."

"Your gratitude is of no use to me," Luga replied, bluntly. "I have no sale for gratitude

like I have for furs. How did you get in the ground?"

"I was waylaid by a masked band of desperadoes, calling themselves the Wolves of Wake-Up, and they buried me as you found me. They accused me of murdering my son and daughter, in order to get the insurance on their lives, and said that it was their object to cause my death, in order that they might realize on my insurance."

"Who was the leader of this band?"

"He called himself Dark Dan."

"Have you any idea who he really is?"

"If I have, I choose to keep it to myself."

"Ah! How about the fact of their accusations against you?"

"They are false as—well, false as can be. I am not the parent to commit a crime for simple monetary gain."

"You had no hand in the poisoning of your daughter, then?"

"None, whatever. My God, how could any one believe me capable of such an act?"

"There are many who do, however. If you had nothing to do with it, who poisoned her?"

"God only knows. I admit I gave her the fatal glass of water, but I was innocent of any knowledge of what it contained."

"You cursed her, and refused to take her back as your daughter?"

"True—I can never forgive myself for that, although I might do the same thing over, under the impulse of an angry moment."

The wolves were edging nearer again, as Luga saw at a glance.

"We must move away from here," she said. "We can talk as we go. You cannot go back to Wake-Up yet. You must accompany me to my hut, and remain there for the present."

She started briskly off, and he followed, as fast as he was able, terrified lest the wolves should come snapping at his feet.

No such an occurrence took place, however, and they were soon ascending the mountain.

"You do not regret your daughter's death, then," Luga said, as they progressed.

"Certainly I do—deeply mourn for her."

"But still believe her in the wrong?"

"Only so far as regards her marrying the scoundrel, Steele, on the sly, and against my will."

"Ah! How long have you believed such a union did take place?"

"Since her death!"

Luga was silent awhile, in deep meditation, before she made any answer.

"You were right in your estimation," she finally said. "Fannie was married to Seth Steele, and I have the proofs in my possession."

"You! What are you doing with them—what do you know of my daughter?"

"More than you think. I hunted down the evidence that frees her character from all stain whatever, and I rescued her from the grave, and brought her back to life!"

"What! What! Are you mad, woman?"

"Not the least. I am saner than many people who pride themselves on their superior civilization. I am but Luga, a half-breed, but I am many times better than a fool!"

"But you are joking—you do not mean to

tell me that my daughter is really alive and well?"

Gerald Gardner was greatly excited as he spoke.

"I am telling you the truth," she said. "Your daughter still lives. Come with me, and do as I say, and you shall see her all in good time. Will you do as I say? Will you promise me?"

"Yes, so long as you do not entrap me into any wrong action."

"Very well. Consider it settled. We will now go to my hut, where it will be the best for you to remain in seclusion for the present. Were you to return to Wake-Up, there is no telling what harm may befall you. Luga will work to the end that you are reunited, and Seth Steele and Dark Dan brought to justice. Then, after having done this, Luga will ask for her reward!"

Gerald Gardner looked at her wonderingly, half-suspicious that her meaning had reference to himself; but the stolidity of expression upon her impassive face betrayed nothing.

CHAPTER XI.

VILLAIN VS. VILLAIN.

In Wake-Up's little town, under cover of the darkness of that night, other events were taking place that it bebooves us to "take in" as a part of the thread of our narrative.

After Jim's departure to call upon Martha McKandless, the town resumed more of its even tenor, although the events of the past few hours were by no means forgotten.

Such "pilgrims" and "galoots" as had money resorted to the various gambling-dens, to try their luck; others lounged about the saloon entrances and bars, while a few sauntered up and down the street.

But when the hour of midnight arrived, only now and then a person was to be seen abroad, and he was invariably making a bee-line for home, unless owing to leg weariness, he was walking "rail fence."

That comical individual, Slumgallion Sloat, had been one of the several who had tarried too long at the Big Injun bar, and the midnight hour found him wandering aimlessly along the main street of the camp, not seeking for any place in particular, nor seeming to care whether his footsteps carried him.

He was in a happy mood, judging by his efforts to sing, now and then, an effort, by the way, that was not a brilliant success, owing to the thickness of his voice.

How long he would have continued to wander, or where he would have gone is hard to say, had not he been brought to a halt by a strong grasp upon his shoulder.

"Hold on! slow up, here!" the owner of the hand ordered emphatically. "What does this sort of business mean?"

"W'ass'er mean?" Slumgallion echoed slowly. "It means I'm drunk, be gosh, an' I don't care who knows it, I don't!" the bummer roared. "I'm a lah-lah, I am—a three hundred-pound baby from Bannock. Who ther blazes aire you, an' why don't yer make yerself fresh, a-puttin' yer flukes on me shoulder?"

"Shut up!" was the gruff reply. "Give me

none of your sass, or I'll jerk you out of your hide. You're a fine specimen of humanity now, ain't you?"

"As purty as they sell 'em, in assorted sizes, am I!" the giant declared. "There's none like me, by the royal dance of old St. Vitus, an' I ain't 'tall bashful who are ketchin' on ter ther fact. Once an' last, who are you?"

"Ah! then, you don't recognize me, in this clever disguise!"

"Ther dickens ye say? Ye ain't ther lieutenant?"

"I am the lieutenant, you bet!" was the response of the black-whiskered individual, who, we may as well apprise the reader, was none other than the individual, Israel Brown, of Jim, the Sport's band, to whom the attention of Fog-horn Fan had been particularly called, by the lieutenant, as elsewhere narrated. "Yes, I'm the lieutenant, and I'm here to learn what news you have."

"News!" echoed the giant—"news! Why darn my boots, I hain't bin here in this hyer salubrious camp but a few hours, yet, an' I'll sw'ar ye can't 'spect any news out o' a felier, in that time!"

"No? But you appear to have taken time to fill up your keg with liquid lightning?"

"Oh! that's but ther natteral consequence o' my bein' introduced to ther people. I'm a prize-package, you know—a livin' curiosity, an' I war led astray. Right up ter the water-mark, they would trot me, an' I either hed ter imbibe, or die dog an' eat the hatchet."

"How about your masquerade?" the lieutenant demanded.

"Oh! that's worked wi' ther seductive efficacy of a Hindoo charm. I literally paralyzed 'em!"

"You are sure no one suspected you to be playing a part?"

"Guess not. Ther galoots all tuk ter me like flies ter 'lasses paper."

"Well, what else? Did you see Ernest Gardner?"

"Yas—I should ker-smile that I did!"

"Ah!"

"You bet. I see'd him git licked ther wu'st o' ary galoot yer ever see'd."

"Indeed! Who licked him, as you express it?"

"A feller callin' hisself John Smith, but who afterward turns out to be Jim, the Sport."

The bullwhacker then went on, and related concerning the numerous events that had transpired, during the fore part of the night, to all of which Lieutenant Seth Steele listened, with manifest interest and eagerness.

"So this Jim had an interview with the McKandlass girl, eh?"

"Yas, two on 'em—the first 'un boin' afore the fight."

"You don't know the nature of the interview?"

"Nary! S'pect last time she war tryin' ter coax him up to marry her."

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders as if he did not hardly coincide with this view.

"You are to remain here in Wake-Up and keep an eye ou this McKandlass girl and her cottage as much as possible," he said. "I have

teun'l the object of my search at this Jim's camp, but not the child. That has been put out somewhere and I believe it is in this camp. I shall know at all events ere long, and you can bet on that. I'll leave you now, but remember! let up on this budging, or I'll never pay you a farthing!"

And then the lieutenant strode rapidly away.

"Ye won't give me a farthing, hey?" Stoot grunted, glaring after him. "Waal, now, we'll see! I've a notion you're none too responsible, anyhow!"

The lieutenant strode on and out of Wake-Up's slumbering camp, until he came to a cabin half a mile beyond the town limits.

It was a rudely-constructed affair, and evidently not regularly tenanted. A light burned within now, however, as was evidenced by the faint ray that gleamed under the door.

Steele did not approach close to the cabin, but halted a short distance away, where a clump of bushes offered him concealment.

Here he waited patiently.

"Yonder is where the Wolves of Wake-Up hold forth!" he muttered, "and they are now holding session. The man I want to see is at their head, but he little suspects that I know him, in his masquerade of Dark Dan."

Fully an hour passed ere there was any stir about the cabin, but his wait did not appear to arouse Steele's impatience. He seemed, rather, to enjoy the wait, his face now and then assuming a singularly triumphant expression.

At length the door of the cabin was opened, and a human head came into view. It was quickly drawn back, however, and the door closed.

Five minutes more elapsed; then, the door again opened and shut, leaving one man out of doors.

He was allowed enough time to get out of the vicinity; then, another came out, and so on, until the last member but one had departed.

As the last man left the cabin, he came very unceremoniously face to face with Lieutenant Steele, and the lieutenant held a cocked revolver in his grasp in the bargain.

"Put down hard on your brakes, Dark Dan!" the lieutenant commanded, exhibiting his revolver menacingly. "Don't tear yourself off by the yard, as though you were a piece of inanimate dry-goods. Open the door, and let's go in, sit down, and have a chat!"

The captain of the Wolves of Wake-Up uttered a fierce oath as he glared at his well-built and "well-heeled" assailant.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am Lieutenant Seth Steele, and I know you! So cheese on the superfluous, and let's go in and have a chat."

Dark Dan regarded the ex-officer a moment, suspiciously; then turned abruptly, entered the cabin, and struck a light.

"What in the name of all the furies ever tempted you to come back here?" he next demanded, facing Steele.

"Oh! I had to wander back again, in order to remove certain obstructions to my future happiness!"

Dark Dan clinched his hands, and a vicious gleam shot from his eyes. It was plain enough

that only the cocked weapon of Steele kept him from springing at the ruffian's throat.

"You mean Fannie?" he gritted.

"Of course, and the babe!" Steele declared, as coolly as if the suggestion of brutal murder was a kind of matter of course. "The job was a failure in one sense, and not carried out in another!"

"What d'ye suppose I care?" Dark Dan demanded, with wolfish fierceness.

"Not the value of the natural wear and tear on a red cent, for a year," Steele at once declared, maintaining his composure. "You got your pay, and consider your hands washed of the matter!"

"I'd be a natural-born fool if I didn't. I was either drunk or crazy when I succumbed to your influence, and agreed to do what you were too much of a coward to do. I did the job for you, and got the money. That's all you need have to expect of me. I set the poison where it was reached, as you directed—what more do you want?"

"Oh! you did the job up like a top! I'm not kicking about that!" Steele hastened to assure. "How in the name of the wonders of wonders did she ever come to life again?"

"I know no more about it than you. I do not even know that she is alive".

"I do. I know that she lives—that she was rescued from the grave by a woman, who has hunted up evidence to the effect that she is my wife; that she expects soon to wed Jim the Sport, and that the babe still lives in Wake-Up!"

Dark Dan regarded him incredulously.

"This is all news to me!" he said. "If you have found it out, in what way am I concerned?"

"Oh! a great deal. Matters are getting down around you pretty tight!"

"Oh! are they?" Dark Dan sneered. "It would seem, by this assertion, that you are better informed about my affairs than I am myself."

"Well, to tell the truth, I am of the opinion that I am. I dare say you have little idea of what danger is meshing around you."

"Maybe. I suppose, of course, you will take supreme delight in keeping me informed?"

"Well, since you seem so repellent to my friendly advances—yes. In the first place it is not known, publicly, who Dark Dan is, except, maybe, to myself—of course not including your associates. The disclosure, as I regard it, would be of little importance from the simple fact that the Wolves of Wake-Up have existed, as such, only for a short time, and I doubt if they are yet dreamt of, locally. Am I not right?"

"Pretty nearl' Dark Dan assented. "How the deuce you ever got onto their existence at all, is a mystery to me."

"Let it remain so. I am one of those fellows who are ever dropping onto little points, of more or less importance. Well, luck placed me in shape to overbear a conversation between Fannie and her half-breed friend. It is unnecessary to say, I have been close upon the heels of the latter, ever since up to a short time ago. Discovery upon discovery has been the result, not the least of which has been the opening up of your little insurance racket, and the rescue of your father, Gerald Gardner!"

"For Heaven's sake, hush!" Dark Dan hissed, taking a step nearer his companion villain. "You ought to know that even walls sometimes have ears."

"Pshaw! Don't get unnerved," Steele laughed, conscious of his triumph over the young outlaw. "We are alone, and can speak plainly. I took a good look around before I accosted you."

"Well?"

"Well? You can begin to see that there is an opening for dark prospects ahead, for you."

"You think you have got me in your power, eh?"

The tone of Dark Dan was most venomous.

"I am not bragging of my triumph," Steele declared. "I simply desire you to know that I know your situation, and that it will most promote your interests to make terms with me. Just cast your thoughts over the matter, and tell me if you do not believe we would be more of a general success on friendly terms than we would as enemies?"

Dark Dan paced up and down the room, like a savage animal, who realized but too keenly the restraint placed over it.

"Go on!" he finally gritted. "You've got the bulge. Let's hear your terms?"

And Steele went deliberately on to make them known.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ASSASSINATION.

"To begin with!" he said, "you are right, in one sense. I have a power over you, for the simple reason that your father is at liberty, and I hired you to set the poison within the grasp of your father, anticipating that Fannie would faint, during her interview with him, and the water would be the first thing he would administer to her, to revive her. A simple written confession of your part in the villainous drama, would be sufficient to at least outlaw you—not?"

"Curse you, talk lower!" Dark Dan cried, savagely. "I believe you have some one outside, listening!"

"Your suspicion is entirely unwarranted!" Steele replied. "Above all, do not give me credit for quite so much treachery as that."

"At any rate, there is no use of your speaking with the voice of a steam locomotive. A little moderation will satisfy my sense of hearing."

"Well, to go on, I could easily betray you—that's certain. I could make you the most detested of men, even by your sister and father, with large chances that Judge Lynch would gather you in. All this I could do, but do not propose to do it, providing you come to my terms. I understand you yourself have been rather unsuccessfully attempting to dabble in love!"

"Well?"

"And got knocked out by Cupid's right hand man?"

"Curse it, what is it to you?"

"Nothing, only I am surprised you allowed him to make such a baby of you."

"Maybe you would be, if you were to fool with him. He's too much for me and I ain't afraid to own it,"

"Which does not forbid you to yearn for revenge!"

"And, I'll have it, too!"

"Right. But you want to go at it so you won't be incurring any personal danger, you see. In fact, you want to leave the handling of this sport to me. I can attend to his case without any trouble, and so effectually that you need never feel fear of being assaulted by him again."

"Well? What devilish scheme are you concocting for me to carry out? I'll swear you are a monster, Steele."

"Pshaw! You have not had enough practical experience to harden you to the iron realism of life. When you have, you will come down to the knowledge that a man's best friend is solid cash, and plenty of it; and only he is fortunate, in these times of adversity, dishonesty and hard-heartedness, who possesses it. But I did not set forth to give you a lecture. Your sister and her child are in my way, and must be put out of it. Knowing where the former is, it will not be a hard matter for me to cause her removal, so that she will trouble me no more. With the child it is different. I cannot take hold of that case myself, but must have some one to assist me."

"And you want me?"

"I do."

"Well, I'll tell you, flat, outright, then, that I'll have nothing whatever to do with the matter. I am glad my sister lives, for it lifts a heavy crime off my shoulders. You can then depend upon it that I won't go on and commit another against my own flesh and blood."

"You say you won't, eh?"

"Most emphatically!"

Dark Dan's tone was stern, decisive and ringing—so much so, in fact, that Steele regarded him with surprise.

"Well, I'll swear you're outspoken enough, in face of the fact that I hold your life right in my hands."

"And I'll swear that I mean just exactly what I said, despite the fact that you have the drop on me. Maybe you can make me a common outlaw by a few words, or make me a corpse by pulling the trigger your forefinger touches, but you can not do more—you can not make me commit another crime against my sister or her child!"

"Phew! how heroically tragic! Those words, uttered in a play, before a crowded house, would make you the success of the season. However, I don't like heroics, and I must unhesitatingly tell you that you are a pronounced fool. I can speak fully as forcible as yourself. Either you come to my terms, or your associates will find your cadaver here when they meet again. Now, do listen to sense and reason. There is no use of your throwing your life away—not the least. Jim the Sport is not the only one you would be revenged upon. This Martha McKandless, who exposed you to public insult—would you not jump at the chance to be revenged upon her?"

"It don't matter. My vengeance upon her will not spoil with time. There is a future when I'll humble her."

"Don't put off till to-morrow what you can

do to-day. It will be useless and unwise. Your chance is now, and I can show you how to get square."

"Well, go ahead. Remember, I promise you nothing."

"You will when you take time to consider. This girl Martha, I believe, has possession of my child."

"Bah, you're crazy! There's no such a child in Wake-Up—at any rate, she hasn't it, and I know it!"

"You do not know it. As I tell you, I am satisfied in my own mind that she has the child in her cottage. What do you not see an excellent chance here to get revenge on her?"

Dark Dan regarded the greater villain with gleaming eyes.

"Seth Steele, it is lucky for you that it is not I who hold that pistol!" he cried, hoarsely. "If I did, I tell you plainly that you'd suffer for that reflection upon Martha McKandless. I'm a villain, I am well aware, but not such a detestable wretch as to attempt to injure her fair name. Nor will I, as I said before, become a party to any of your schemes. Got leave me. We can never make terms!"

"By Heaven, you shall see!" Steele gritted, venomously. "If you won't make terms with me, you shall have an opportunity to do so with the one who gave you life. Die, Ernest Gardner—die!"

The raised pistol exploded, not once, but repeatedly, and with a smothered cry of pain the lesser villain threw up his hands and fell forward upon his face.

Then, with a shudder, the assassin extinguished the light and fled from the cabin.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW FRIEND.

The following morning was a gloomy one, as if foreshadowing trouble and calamity to the many who saw its dawn. The heavens were overcast with leaden clouds, that hung low toward the earth, and a chilly mist kept all unsheltered objects in a dripping state.

At Jim's stronghold, a piercing raw breeze swept across the plateau and caused the members of the band to keep pretty closely to their tepees, where they indulged in card-playing, to pass away time.

Within her own capacious lodge, Fannie Gardner, or Fogborn Fan, moved slowly about.

She appeared nervous, anxious and depressed. Her eyes had a wild expression, not peculiar to those of an ordinary expectant bride.

Plainly, she dreaded the coming of the hour, when she was pledged to give her hand to Jim, in marriage. Not because she did not love him. She would willingly have knelt at his feet, and worshiped him, if that would have made matters any better.

But she knew it wouldn't. She was another man's wife, and would be committing an unpardonable wrong, in wedding Jim, without giving him a full history of her past life, and misfortune.

This she fully determined to do, as soon as he should arrive back at camp. She would tell him all and release him.

"Ugh! it is a dismal morning, out," she said,

as a fierce gust of wind went shrieking across the plateau. "How strangely it is in keeping with my spirits. Ah! why do I live at all, when life, now, is but a torture to me? Why not go hurl myself into the abyss and end all my trouble? But, no: I must see him, once more, and humbly ask his forgiveness for the wrong I have come so near doing him. It is time he were back, now!"

The tinkling of the bell attached to the skin which guarded the entrance to her tent, caused her to give a start of expectancy.

"Come in," she said.

It was not Jim, but the lieutenant of his band, Caleb Cawthorn, who entered in response to the invitation.

"Ah! is it you, sir?" Fannie said, smiling. "Isn't it a very disagreeable morning out?"

"Unusually so, for this time of year. I suppose you were expecting a visit from Jim, instead of me, and wonder what brings me in his place?"

"I was expecting him, to tell the truth. Has he not arrived in camp yet?"

"He has not, and, judging by a note I have just received, he is not likely to soon. His letter was handed to one of the pickets beyond the gap, and thence delivered to me. What do you make of it?"

It was simply an unenveloped note that he handed her, and she received it with paling cheeks.

The chirography was like Jim's, although the note had evidently been written in considerable haste.

It ran thus:

"LIEUTENANT CAWTHORN.—Circumstances have arisen, which make it imperative that I retire from the leadership of the band, which so far has been organized to no purpose except self-protection. To you I now assign the command, with the wish that my name no longer be used in connection with the band.

"Yours respectfully,
"JIM THE SPORT."

"I can't see what has got into the fellow—can you?" the lieutenant said, as Fannie concluded the perusal.

"I think I can understand," she replied, with a forced calmness. "Ah! you have another letter there?"

"Yes. It is for you, but I am almost afraid to give it to you, lest it bring you bad news!" Cawthorn said, anxiously.

"Let me have it. I am steeled to stand anything!" she replied quickly. "I know pretty nearly what are the contents."

He surrendered the letter, not without manifest anxiety; she seized it, read it rapidly, then reread it aloud to the lieutenant, and tore it into shreds deliberately.

The contents were as follows—bitter comfort to unfortunate Fannie:

"FANNIE:—By the time you get this, I hope your conscience has smitten you that the effect of these few words may be less painful than they otherwise would be. One thing is certain: you have basely deceived me, and are unworthy of my hitherto unmeasured respect for you. I know all—of your history from the time you met Seth Steele up to the present time. I have even seen the child. Oh that I did not know all this before! What a shock it would have saved me! As it now stands, I shall,

without a doubt, wed another, who, at least, is above reproach. Beware! Never again let me see your face, or I may forget that you are a woman and shoot you down as I would a dog. Beware! I say, fair schemer!"

JIM."

Such were the contents of the note that reached her that raw, dismal morning, when the outside elements in themselves were sufficient to chill the gayest of spirits.

The pieces of the letter fluttered to the ground slowly, as her white fingers detached them.

Her face had grown very white, and the wild brilliancy of her lustrous eyes had increased.

Cawthorn stood gazing at her, not knowing what to say or do. He expected every instant to see her totter and fall.

It was a misconception on his part, however; she was too firm to faint.

"You know, now, why he has resigned the command!" she said, after a short silence, her tone showing no tremor of the excitement she was laboring under.

"I never was more surprised in all my life!" Cawthorn replied. "I never thought the captain would do anything like it."

"I never expected to receive such a letter from him!" she said, fiercely. "It is not at all like what I had judged him to be. He here descends to brutality and the showing of a coarse nature, such as I never gave him credit for possessing."

"But this charge—"

"Is only too true. I have a husband and a child living—the former, a human brute, who, after marrying me, discarded me and denied our marriage. Knowing this, I was of course wrong in receiving Yreka Jim's advances, but—but—I couldn't help it. I learned to love him, and in doing so, to forget that I was not free. Oh! I have been a fool—worse than a fool—and I will go end this miserable life of mine!"

She took a step toward the door, with the evident intention of executing her threat, but Cawthorn prevented her.

"Stop! are you mad?" he cried. "You surely must be to think of throwing away your life, and you so young! Yreka Jim is not the only man in the world, and more than that—he has wronged you, in writing you such a letter."

"He has wronged me, true. I was all prepared to tell him everything this morning, but he was not man enough to face me and give me the chance! Oh! I believe I hate him as much now, as I loved him before!"

She spoke fiercely, vehemently.

Every fiber of her being seemed nerved with sudden-wrought indignation.

Cawthorn gazed at her keenly.

"I don't know but what you're pretty near right!" he said. "He hasn't served you any too fairly, and while I am not personally his enemy, I am heartily your friend and sympathize with you."

"I wonder if you do?" and she turned and gazed at him searchingly. "I wonder if you do sympathize with me enough to be my friend in this hour of trouble?"

"You can rest assured of that. I am little

else but a stranger to you, 'tis true, but you can depend upon it, I am a man of honor and of my word, and I should esteem it a great favor to befriend you whom others have so heartlessly deserted."

He put forth his hand as he spoke, and tears of gratitude sprung into her eyes as she took it.

"This is an unexpected comfort; it lifts a load from my heart to believe that I have even one friend left. But, stop—I must not even accept your friendship, 'for that would be dragging you into trouble!'"

"How so, pray?"

"Because, henceforth I live for an object—that object *revenge!*"

"On Jim the Sport?"

"Yes, and on the black hearted demon who has been the curse of my life and blasting of fond hopes—Seth Steele."

"Bravely spoken, lady! I admire your spirit. With this wretch of a husband released from you, your life might not be such a blank. A bright and happy future might be in store for you. Is it not so?"

"Possibly you are right, sir. I am sure I do not know yet."

"And where can you find one more able and at the same time more willing to espouse your cause than I? With these rangers on my hands, and thrust into my command, why should I not be able to become your defender as well as your avenger? Look upon my face, and tell me if you think I would be worthy of such a responsibility!"

He tore the mask from his face, and stood erect and brave for inspection.

His was not the handsome face that an artist would grow enthusiastic over, but it was one of almost perfect mold, pleasant to look upon, and indicating manly traits of character that so many handsome faces sadly lack. A firm but pleasant mouth, shaded by a gracefully-trained mustache, and the sparkling brown eyes were its special features, while his hair was worn long, and was soft and luxuriant.

With an athletic figure, he was far from being a bad-looking fellow.

No expression of Foghorn Fan's face betrayed whether she was pleased with his appearance, or otherwise.

She simply bowed, and said:

"I am very grateful for your offer, and believing in your candor, will accept it. When Seth Steele is dead, and I am revenged to my satisfaction, on Jim the Sport, it will be time enough for me to prove to you that I have means enough at my command to reward you! You may go, now, as I wish to be alone!"

He bowed low, and donning his mask and hat, went out into the cold, raw, misty morning.

"I have but to fight for her, now, to win her!" he muttered. "Jim never dreamt that I secretly admired her; but he shall find, when too late, that he has spurned a jewel he can never recover, and that jewel shall shine for me! Cale Cawthorn, you are in luck!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GIANT ON THE FAKE.

"HOORAY! hooray! It's me—it's me, the great spider-futed, sun-tanned tarant'ler frum

Took-'em-In-Out-O'-the-Wet, you *bet*. I'm a mermaid, I am—I'm a durned dilaperdated Dutchman from Boozville, w'ot never see'd a woman, an' I don't keer who knows it. Oh! set forth ther flowin' bowl, and let me drench me soul wi' ther essence of old Bacchus, w'ot puts a man in ther hoel!"

Thus sung out Slumgallion Sloat, as he tottered into the Big Injun bar-room, that raw misty morn, shortly after day-dawn, his painful attempt to walk straight, proving beyond doubt that he had got up with a "head" on him, and by no means had recovered from the effects of the stimulants he had absorbed, the previous night.

The bar-room was not yet as well filled with guests, as usual, but there were perhaps a dozen of the time-honored luminaries hanging around, who had one or more "eye-openers," and would not be bashful about taking one or two more, providing some liberal-minded individual were to extend a general invitation.

But as Sloat's financial status was not an open letter, these men held aloof, till the result of his own request for a "smile" became assured. The Big Injun's sedate bartender regarded the giant with a "size-up" stare.

"Did you hear me, semi-quaver?" the latter roared, lurching up against the bar. "Set out the sweat o' Bacchus's breath—I want a gallon ter taper off on, an' I know my less fortunate brethern hev been mournfully gazin' at ther floor, fer ther interstice 'twixt now and dawn, expectin' every minute ter see a South American anaconda or a python stick his head up through a knot howl. Out hyer, wi' ther gelorous 'ram'-prodoocer, or by ther double clog ov old Saint' Vitus I'll paint this hyar shebang cardinal, in a holy second!"

"If you want bug-juice let's feel yer coin," the dispenser of beverage growled. "Ther slate o' this ranch hev been broke many a long days an' ther quarrymen aire on a strike."

"Ye don't hint?" the guzzler leered. "Why, ye'r a daisy, you aire. Fer a payin' quartz mine I'd kiss you, I would. Did yer, fer a atomic breathin' space, think that I, ther great an' only dyspepsia tonic from Durango, would stoop so low as ter solicit a solitary snifter frum yer sedate semblance o' ther Darwinian link? Did yer fer a minnet—just one sixty-second minnit—think I war broke? Majestic mixer of maudlin mischief, you have erred, erroneously, extemporaneously, and egotistically. You have provoked the profane thoughts of ther great curiosity of ther age—by gosh! Set out ther salubrious swill, if you but kindly will, an' quick as 'twere ter kill, deduct *pro rata* from this ten-dollar bill!"

And down upon the counter the bill in question floated, while, with a smile of manifold sweetness, Slumgallion turned his beaming visage toward the line of luminaries who were helping to hold up the opposite wall of the room.

"Der yer want me ter call a coupe, gents?" he mildly suggested.

Twelve thirsty mortals forthwith marched forward and touched the bar, and the bartender smiled benignly in his alacrity to set out the beverage.

"Ye'r a brick," one miner complimented, who had probably not had a drink before that morning. "Ef I warn't afeard o' gittin' kissed back, I'd osculate yer!"

"Don't! don't! I pray ye don't," Slumgallion remonstrated. "I don't wanter die till ther ground gits dried off."

As the proposed osculator was positively the homeliest-looking man in Wake-Up, the giant's refusal to indulge, "took," and created a general laugh, in which the victim also heartily joined.

"Neow, gents, thet I'm in out o' the wet," Sloat went on, "we'll take another bottle of amber, an' then I've got a little discovery to tell ye about!"

As discoveries were not every-day occurrences in the deep-down town, and as the aforementioned "amber" was well calculated for setting the nerves in motion, another potion was imbibed, and then the crowd fell back to help the wall brace up, and looked inquiringly at the whacker for the promised revelation.

He went at it with the air of one who had something of vast importance to communicate.

"Yer see," he began, "sar'tin sarcumstances made me leg-weary, last evening, an' when I meandered forth from yer September presence, I war not particular whar I went so long as I danced a hornpipe on ther head of every snake thet war tryin' ter git a night's lodgin' within the bosom of my boots. Every tree luked jest like some old cast-iron pard o' mine, an' nary a tree had bin takin' a drap, fer I c'uldn't get 'em off their base. Even ther moon laffed like a hoss when I tried ter walk over a cabin, an' when I tried ter raise a sluice-box thinkin' et war a glass o' bug-juice, et said I better go take er bath, an' I took it. Et war ther first, fer years, but I tuk et like er leetle man. Arter I got wet, a sleepy feelin' overtuk me, an' I laid down an' got wetter. Ther wetter I got, ther more wide-awake I got, an' arter I got able ter size up things, I found thet I war layin' alongside o' a cabin, a gud mile frum any sluice-box. Ther bath must hev bin a freak o' my fertile imagination. Thar used ter be a tho't in my mind thet I would be a succcess as a liar, anyhow.

"Waal, when I found myself alongside ther cabin, I laid thar an' soaked in mist an' reflection fer awhile, till I calcylated I could keep my feet frum trampin' on top o' my head; then I got up an' reconnoitered. I crept around ter ther front o' ther cabin an' found ther door open. Peepin' in, what 'er yer s'pose I see'd, pilgrims—what 'er d'ye reckon I feasted these luv-lukkin' lanterns o' mine on, wi' horror an' double-distilled consternate?"

"A whale?" suggested the homely man, anticipating another shock of facetiousness.

"An anaconda, or a python," put in another.

"Nuthin' o' ther sort," retorted Sloat. "I hed every reptile in quarantine, an' what I see'd I see'd wi' unbiased eyes. But come; let's take suthin' afore ye hear the finis."

"Suthin'" was not declined, it is needless to say, and the bartender mildly suggested that another round would make the ten-dollar William look sick.

"Now, then, doan't keep us in suspension!" the homely man suggested. "Ef you've got anything important on the hooks, let's have it."

"Oh, thar's time enough!" Sloat grinned. "Sech important sandwiches as this one I now handle are keepable. Ther first important thing is, who aire sheriff o' this hyer burg?"

"Jake Grab! Jake Grab!"

"Aire ther aforesaid Mr. Snatchem present hyer?"

"You bet!" a hoarse voice cried, and the bully of the deep-down town stepped into the saloon, from out of the wet.

"Kerect; you're the man wanted," Sloat cried. "Before ye standeth, gents, a man o' bizness, you bet, cl'arter ther heel. Ther nus-sin'-bottle o' my youth hed 'biz' blown in ther side, an' I clung ter that aire bottle till Taos whisky hed eat a hoel thru' ther glass. Feller-galoots, I'm not a parsimonious pilgrim, but when I kin raise a stake, et aire balm o' Gilead to my narves. I have made a discovery, and wanter know what's yer tariff, byer in Wake-Up, fer exposin' a murder?"

"Murder?"

"Yas, murder most fowl, perpetrated by a chicken-hearted wretch. I know ther son-of-a-gun, do I, an' when ye disclose ther tariff ye pay informers, the chances are huge that I'll show ye an opportunity fer pullin' hemp!"

"Ef yer know o' any murder, spit it out!" Jake Grab growled. "We don't pay nary a bit o' tariff fer information, you bet!"

"Then et's nary a p'int ye git out o' me!" Sloat declared. "I'm allers in fer spec', I am, an' when I kan't realize I don't invest. So ef ary gerloot is disposed ter shake a fifty-dollar Williamette under my nose, why, I'll tell whar ter find ther cadaver, an' who I see'd standin' over et wi' a smokin' six."

"Ef ye don't spit it out we'll hustle ye!" Grab exclaimed savagely.

"Hustle and be durned!" Slumgallion sent back. "I'm ther sort of a patent thet don't take water nary time. Bug-juice aire gud enuff fer me, you kin bet. Ye kin hustle me, hang me, b'ile me, roast me, or ary thing ye please, but ye ken't fetch a sekrit out o' me when I ain't in ther mood fer tellin' it."

"Raise a purse. It's wu'th fifty, durned ef 'tain't, ter hev a leetle necktie-party on a day like this!" declared a miner. "Hyer's ther Big Injun allus chock-full o' enterprise, fer instance."

"Gents," spoke up the German proprietor, waddling along, "I dells you v'ot I do. I vas shock-full mit enterprise, or v'ot efer you calls 'em, an' if you bromise to bang der veller in front mit my blace oud, und leave him hang dere all day mit my free-lunch sign pinned to him, I gif der amount you vant."

A thunder of approbation and applause greeted this proposal, and three cheers and a tiger for' Schnepf were repeatedly given.

An agreement was promptly made, and the money as promptly paid over to Slumgallion Sloat.

"Now then, let yerself loose!" Jake Grab growled. "Ef ye parley about it, up ye go!"

"Then I'll be as quick as a hop-toad arter a

boss fly. Ther alluded-to cabin, where I found myself lyin' alongside of, airs out o' town, down ther gulch, an' luks like no one hed lived ther permanently fer some time—leastwise, I should infer sech war ther case. Waal, when I ariz, as I war sayin' a bit ago, my seein' and comprehendin' fackulties war in prime order. By ther way, that reminds me—hadn't we better take a ball?"

Eager as was the crowd, it was out of the question to refuse, and the drink was had.

" Ther door war open, when I sneaked around front," went on the bummer, " and I looked in. Now, git ready! Thar, upon ther floor, war a recently-manufactured corpus, wi' a bloody head, an' a man clutchin' a rewolver, a-standin' over him. In utter horror an' double-distilled consternate, I turned and meandered!"

" The murderer!—who was he?" yelled a dozen hoarse, discordant voices.

" He war ther same galoot who got off so easy before—Jim the Sport!" triumphantly announced the irrepressible Slumgallion.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SPORT CLAIMS HIS PRIZE.

To say the announcement created an immense sensation would be " putting it mild." For a moment the men glared at each other, without an utterance; then Jake Grab gave vent to a fearful oath.

" Boyees, et aire jest as I tho't!" he snarled, his dusky face growing ugly with passion. " We orter 'a' hung ther dog, when we hed him."

" You bet!" agreed the crowd, in a chorus. " But he sha'n't escape us this time, never!"

" Don't be too sure o' thet!" Grab grunted. " He aire as slippery as a soft-soap ladle. Ef we git him, it's got ter be did wi' promptness and strategy, an' once we git him, shute him on ther spot!"

" Keerect! keerect! You do ther plannin', Jake, an' we'll do ther exekootin'!"

" I allow I'll have a hand in that, too," the bully declared, grimly. " Does ary galoot know whar the sport is now?"

No one signified assent.

" I skinned out when I see'd him!" Sloat declared, " fearin' ef he kotched me lookin' at him, he'd make et lively fer me."

" Let nary a word o' this matter leak out," Grab ordered, after a few minutes' reflection. " We'll separate, an' scout around until we find him. Then, arter an hour, we'll meet here an' report. Whoever has seen him, an' located him, wull lead ther gang down upon him, an' ef he don't surrender we'll ridle him with bullets. Make a break now, an' mum's ther word, an' eyes fer lookin'. Ther man who heels him shell be entitled to a purse o' a hundred dollars, ef I hev ter make it gud myself!"

" An', gents, 'fore ye go out inter ther wet, jest take er drink wi' yer uncle, Slumgallion Sloat, ther man who never see'd but one woman, an' kim near losin' his heart, then!" the giant bawled.

The drink was bad, and then the dozen roughs left the saloon, on their vengeful mission.

Each man understood what he was to do, and

there seemed but little doubt but what Jim would be run down, if he was in Wake-Up's deep-down camp.

Slumgallion Sloat did not embark in the search, but remained at the Big Injun Saloon, and amused himself by pouring down glass after glass of liquor. Plain it was that he was in for a dead drunk, and the prospects were very fair that he would be a " goner," even ere the avenging party returned.

And where was Jim the Sport?

That was a question, that one particular party within the Big Injun, asked himself. The person in question was none other than the sedate bartender, Gideon Glare. And it was only by a singular coincidence that he did so. Six months before, he had arrived in Wake-Up, penniless and hungry, and disheartened. Finding work scarce, he had applied to Martha McKandlass for a job. She told him that there were no vacancies in the mine, but, instead of turning him away, destitute, she had taken a five-dollar gold-piece from her purse, and given it to him.

He had not forgotten the kindness, by any means, and just now it flashed across his mind that Martha McKandlass was deal in love with Jim—so report sai'd.

" It's but a return of favors," he mused, " to give her a chance to warn her lover. I'll do it."

He obtained temporary leave of absence, and hurried in a roundabout way, to the McKandlass cottage, and found Martha standing in the doorway, broom in hand.

" Miss McKandlass, you are a friend of Jim, are you not?" he hastily asked.

" Certainly," she replied. " Why do you ask?"

" Because you must hunt him up at once, and notify him either to fly from the camp, or secrete himself. Jake Grab and a dozen others are quietly hunting for him and will shoot him down at sight. They charge him with a murder that has been committed."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and hastened away.

Martha had turned very white, and for a moment was so faint that she was forced to lean against the doorpost for support. Then rallying, she hastily put on her hat, and hurried toward the heart of the camp.

Even in her anxiety and excitement, she had not forgotten the precaution to take a basket along with her. This, she argued, would throw off the suspicion that she was hunting for Jim.

She had not gone a hundred yards before she saw him, standing beside a cabin, engaged in smoking a cigar.

At her beckon he rapidly approached.

" For Heaven's sake, hurriedly get to my cottage, and secrete yourself. I will explain on my return," she said as she passed him.

She then went on toward the supply store, on entering which, she came face to face with Jake Grab.

" Hillo!" he cried, getting in her path. " Whar's Jim the Sport?"

" How do you suppose I know?" she answered, tartly. " Here, Mr. Kine, give me a peck of potatoes."

Her reply caused Grab to chuckle.

"So Jim give ye ther shake, hey?" he leered, grimly.

"Of course! Good riddance," she replied. "A pound of coffee, please."

The articles were given her, and she quitted the store and returned to the cottage.

Jim was seated composedly in the front room, evidently not much alarmed.

"Oh, sir! have you heard the news?" Martha said, breathlessly. "A murder has been committed, and you are charged with the crime. Grab and his followers are searching the town for you, with the intention of shooting you down at sight."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes! A friend just told me to find you, and to tell you to fly for your life!"

Jim's laugh echoed through the room.

"Well, not having wings, I don't see that I would make much of a success at trying to fly. So, I am charged with murder, eh?"

"Yes!"

"Pity they can't scare up some other charges against me, just to make it interesting. I think I understand how it comes that I am charged with the crime. This morning, at daybreak, I discovered a dead man in the cabin, up the gulch. He had been killed some hours before. Some one must have seen me enter and leave the place, and thus has fastened the charge upon me."

"Who was the murdered man?"

"Ernest Gardner!"

"Mercy! you are not sure?"

"Yes. The poor devil was masked, but on removing his mask, I had no difficulty in recognizing him."

"Who could have murdered him?"

"Dunno. Reckon I'll have to give that up as a puzzle, just now."

"What will you do? The searchers may pounce down upon us at any instant, and I don't believe they'll show you any mercy this time."

"I dare say not!" and the sport looked grim. "Even though I am guiltless, it will not be easy to establish that fact now, to their satisfaction. That I am thoroughly convinced of. I shall have to packachee, I suppose, as there are no longer any ties to keep me around here."

He then took a letter from his pocket, and handed it to her.

"One of my men, Israel Brown, by name, brought me this, not many minutes ago," he said. "You can see that it is in one sense the ending of what might have been."

It was from Foghorn Fan, and ran as follows:

"JIM:—As you know all, you were wise in keeping away. I have accepted Cawthorn and the men as my *corps de expo' sal*, and you may expect no mercy if you fall into my hands. So beware of the vengeance of Foghorn Fan!"

"It appears that she has learned that you are possessed of her secret," Martha said, her heart beating a little faster.

"Yes. That is what puzzles me," the sport replied, thoughtfully. "I cannot understand how she gained knowledge of the fact, and so soon, too."

Had he known it, the matter was not so great a puzzle after all—just the scheming villainy of one man, and that man Seth Steele. Both letters received at the mountain-camp, as well as this one which he had himself delivered to Jim, were the forgeries of his own production.

"Yes, I shall not go back to the camp now, and I was in some doubt about doing so before receiving this letter," the sport went on. "I shall leave these parts for some place where Jim has never been heard of and there spend the balance of my days in quiet. I shall not go alone. I have made up my mind that I am entitled to the prize I won, and I want you to accompany me as my bride, Martha!"

"Sir! You surprise me!"

"Do I? I hope it is not an unwelcome surprise. In a few hours my feelings have undergone a change, and though I will not tell you I love you in so short a space of acquaintanceship, you have won my heartiest esteem, and I would be quite willing to undertake to make you a kind and affectionate husband. Go with me, and I promise you shall fill the gap in my life Foghorn Fan has left vacant."

"Sir, you have taken me greatly by surprise, and I cannot answer you. I—I—"

"There! we have no time to parley, for I must be off ere I am discovered. I will not take no for an answer. To-night at dusk, meet me at the gap where the wolves congregata. I know of a secret cave there, where, if necessary, we can take refuge till morning, when, provided with horses, we will turn our backs upon this town!"

"But, sir, I—I—what—why, I cannot. What will I do about my property?"

"After our marriage you can return and dispose of it!"

"But—Fanny's baby?"

"Bring it with you and it shall have a home with us, until she herself wants it. There! I have no time to say more, but shall depend upon it that you will be there. Yonder comes a man, this way, now. Good-by!"

He caught her in his arms and imprinted a kiss upon her burning cheeks—then sprung away out of the cabin by the rear door and was lost to view in an instant.

From a hedge of vines and bushes near the cottage window, a pair of gleaming eyes glared after him.

They belonged to Seth Steele!

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE search for Jim the Sport in Wake-Up was not successful. Nearly every resort and dwelling was either visited or watched, but no signs of the festive James were seen, and when, after an hour, the searchers reassembled at the Big Injun Saloon, the general opinion was that Jim had folded his tent, so to speak, and stolen silently away.

A new detail of searchers was, however, sent out to keep watch.

Thus the day passed slowly away.

No visit was paid to the McKandlass cottage, for Jake Grab had expressed his willingness to

stake his life that the sport was not there, and that settled the matter.

About three hours before sunset, while the would-be lynchers of Jim, to the number of twenty, were drinking in the Big Injun, Seth Steele, in his disguise of Israel Brown, entered the saloon, shook hands with Slumgallion Sloat, and they had a few words in private.

Then Jake Grab was taken into the confab, and the trio ultimately quitted the saloon.

"Now, see byer!" Grab growled, when they had halted some distance away. "I wanter understand this thing. You say he'll be hangin' around Wolf Run to-night?"

"Yes—about sunset."

"An' ye want me ter go help capture him?"

"Yes—you and Sloat."

"Why not take more?"

"Because we've got to approach separately, lay in concealment and watch for him like cats for mice. The least betrayal of our presence in the neighborhood will lose us the game. The first one that sights him is to drop him. If it kills him, good. If it don't, we'll hang him!"

"And what then?"

"This much. You two fellows come back to Wake-Up a hundred dollars apiece richer. I go my way. That's all."

"Ther' ain't no monkey biz'ness about this!" Grab demanded savagely. "He's a cold stiff that plays me fer a sucker."

"Never fear. Get your rifles and meet me beyond town as soon as possible. Be careful no one suspects where you're going!"

He then strode away.

Half an hour later he was rejoined, half a mile above the town, by the two roughs, and they mounted horses that Steele had in waiting, and set out for Wolf Run at a gallop.

When within a mile of the dangerous trysting-place of the mountain brutes, they drew rein and dismounted, secreting their horses in the underbrush. Then they proceeded stealthily on foot, until they came to the opening where the wolves held their nocturnal orgies.

Here they separated, and crept to different positions, overlooking the dell, where they could watch and wait, without being seen themselves.

It was sunset by this time, and they were hopeful that it would not be long ere Jim made his appearance.

In this respect they were not doomed to disappointment. Not quite half an hour after their arrival there was a crunching sound in the underbrush, and the sport entered the dell, and approached the creek, glancing sharply about him as he did so.

If his appearance was any criterion, he had no suspicion of lurking enemies. But those enemies were there, lying in wait, and the mountain Apollo had not reached the bank of the creek when there rung out upon the evening air the sharp report of a rifle.

Throwing up his arms, Jim the Sport fell backward to the ground, and lay there motionless.

"Hooray, boys!" Jake Grab cried, breaking from cover, "I fixed him, you bet—tuk him plum thru ther pulsometer! They say Jake Grab can't shute much, but this don't prove it."

The three assassins rushed forward toward the prostrate sport, and had nearly reached him, when, as suddenly as had come the rifle-shot, Jim sat up with a cocked revolver in either hand.

"Bang! bang!"

Two shots were fired, one from each pon, and two men as suddenly tumbled to the ground.

Before the third shot could be fired, the third man, Seth Steele, threw himself bodily upon the sport, and the two engaged in a desperate struggle—a struggle for life and death.

Both were powerful men, and both knew that one or the other must die there upon the wolves' assembly ground, his body to serve the animals a nocturnal feast.

In the grapple, their grip was such that neither had any particular advantage.

This, despite the fact that the sport was the under man.

Nerved to desperation, they rolled and struggled for several minutes with no noticeable change. It really appeared as if it were a matter that could only be decided by one man losing his strength.

Such, however, was not the case, for there suddenly resounded upon the night air the clatter of horses' feet, and a cavalcade dashed into the glade.

Rein was instantly drawn, as the two struggling foes were discovered, and a general dismount made.

The party consisted of Foghorn Fan, Cale Cawthorn and Jim's band, who had started on their trail of vengeance.

In the struggle, the disguise had been torn from Steele's face, and Foghorn Fan at once recognized both of the contestants,

"Seize those men!" she ordered, sternly; "securely bind them beyond possibility of escape. Our trail has come to a sudden and unexpected end."

The road-riders hastened to obey, and not without a little difficulty parted the men and bound them hand and foot.

They were then forced to stand up while Foghorn Fan confronted them, facing her recreant and unfaithful husband first.

"So we have met at last, have we, Seth Steele?" she said, her tone fierce and merciless. "After all, you stand before your wronged wife?"

Steele's dark, handsome face now became positively ugly with passion.

"I seem to recognize that face of yours," he replied, with an ironical leer. "I suppose you're in good health, madam?"

"In decidedly better health than you will be when I get through with you, I assure you!" she replied, coldly. "Seth Steele, you have been a brute, a villain, an unparalleled wretch!"

"A vagabond, a monster, a wretched heart-breaker, a ruffian, a cut-throat, a—but that will do, won't it?" and he laughed mockingly.

"No title tongue could mention would be too bad for you, sir. Your conduct has been so wicked that I should think you would feel ashamed to face me!"

"But I ain't, you see. I ain't one of the

weak-kneed fainty kind, and you ought to know it!"

"Are you not abashed to face me, knowing 'Of course you wronged me?'"

"Bound the least."

He artfully defiantly.

"If you had it to do over again—"

"I would do the same!"

"Then your fate will be but justice. You are a monster, and a curse upon the earth. You shall die!"

She spoke without a tremor of compassion or pity. Her face was stern, cold and passionless; she appeared more like a judge than a girl who had once been a gentle wife.

At a signal from her, Steele was taken to a tree, on the bank of the creek, and securely lashed to the trunk.

His features were a trifle paler, but he showed no signs of tremor or remorse.

"You are to be shot!" the wronged woman announced. "You have just five minutes to make peace with the Ruler, above!"

Then five men, armed with rifles, took their positions in line, facing the doomed wretch, and half a dozen yards from him.

They cocked their weapons, ready for use.

Foghorn Fan drew her watch from her belt, and fixed her gaze intently upon the dial.

And Seth Steele?

His face grew whiter and whiter, and for a moment perhaps, his lips moved, as if in prayer; then, he shut his teeth hard together, and waited for the worst.

"Time is up!" Foghorn Fan finally said, her voice cold and pitiless. "I hope the Almighty will deal more tenderly with you than you have done with me. Men, do your duty!"

Mechanically the rifles came to bear, and an instant later five bullets sped upon their deadly mission.

Steele probably never knew what struck him, for he died almost instantly.

Scarcely deigning him a glance, after the volley was fired, Foghorn Fan turned to Jim the Sport.

"I suppose you may judge what mercy I shall have on you!" she said, coldly. "You won my love, only to spurn it, on the account of Martha McKandlass. She shall never have you, I swear to that. She is a pure, confiding girl, whose character stands without a blemish. You are as unworthy of her, as I was of you. You shall pay the penalty of death, which her intervention saved you from!"

"Very well!" Jim the Sport replied, firmly. "You are the last person I would ask my life from. If I hang, you will have to answer for it."

She made no reply, but waved her hand to the men.

The sport was led, or rather forced forward, to the tree, to which Seth Steele's corpse was still bound. A noosed rope was thrown over a limb, and the noose adjusted about the sport's neck. There seemed no doubt, this time, but the adventurer was doomed.

The men seized hold of the "pull" end of the lariat, and awaited for the word to send Jim into eternity.

"One!" Foghorn Fan counted.

Her voice was not clear—it was unsteady—she evidently was anxious to get through work she had undertaken—quickly as possible.

"Two!"

Hark!

A woman's shrill scream!

Then, the woman.

"Stop! stop! for the love of God—and your child!"

It was Martha McKandlass.

She came flying in upon the scene, breathless, and nearly exhausted.

One hand clutched a revolver—her other arm held Baby Nelly, Foghorn Fan's child!

"Stop! Fanny Gardner! Harm that man at your peril! All's fair in love or war, and if you harm a hair of Jim the Sport's head, I'll blow out the brains of your innocent babe!"

The girl avenger turned, and gazed at her rival, wildly—then, at the sweet-faced innocent, whose big blue eyes were staring around.

Her features softened, tears sprung into her eyes, and she turned to the rangers.

"Release the prisoner!" she ordered. "I will forego my vengeance."

She turned then, and clasped the babe in her arms, raining tears and kisses, at the same time, upon its face.

When Jim the Sport was freed, she took Martha by the hand, and leading her to Jim, joined their hands together.

"Take her, Jim!" she said, bravely, "and be good to her. God bless you both! Forgive me for what wrong I have done either of you, and when you are united and happy, and I have entered a new life, perhaps we may meet again. Good-by!"

She turned abruptly away, with tearful eyes, and Cawthorn assisted her to mount her horse, with the babe in her arms.

The rest of the band mounted, and, with a general "good-by," rode away, leaving Jim and his "prize" alone.

What shall we add in conclusion?

Jim the Sport and Martha found their way to the nearest town boasting of a parson and were married. Martha then sold out her property in Wake-Up, and she and Jim disappeared as if the world had opened and swallowed them; but that a spirit so restless and daring as that of the adventurer can long play the peaceful role of a contented husband is improbable.

In due time, through the instrumentality of the Wolf Queen, Gerald Gardner and Fanny were happily reconciled; the past was forgiven, and with Cawthorn, who soon became Fanny's husband, and a good father to little Ne'ly, all went to a distant locality, where to try their fortunes anew.

Papers found upon Ernest Gardner's person established still further his dark villainy, and no one doubted that the fate he had plotted his father, the unnatural scoundrel had accomplished for his poor brother.

Wake-Up still lives, but there is no one there of interest to the reader, and thus we will draw the curtain.

THE END.

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